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William Makepeace Thackeray

BY

CHARLES WHIBLEY

NEW YORK
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1903

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THACKERAY

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHICAL

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY was born at Calcutta on July 18, 1811. His family, sprung from yoemen of Yorkshire, was distinguished throughout the eighteenth century in the learned professions, as well as in the civil and military services of India. Thackerays not a few had lived and died in the making of our Eastern Empire. They had done those deeds of simple heroism which benefit a people, and bring their authors but little fame. They had built roads, they had administered justice, and more than one had fallen on the battle-field. Eminent amongst them was Richmond Thackeray, Collector at Alipur, who in 1810 married Anne Becher, herself the daughter of a family famous in Bengal. Five years later the Collector died, leaving a widow and one son, William Makepeace, just four years old, who grew up to be the author of *Vanity Fair*. Like Clive Newcome, William Makepeace left India a child of six, and when he pictured the Colonel "tottering up the steps of the ghaut," he pictured his own experience. "I wrote this," he confessed, "remem-

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bering in long, long distant days such a ghaut, or river-stair at Calcutta; and a day when down those steps, to a boat which was in waiting, came two children, whose mothers remained on shore. . . . We were first cousins; had been little playmates and friends from the time of our birth; and the first house in London to which I was taken was that of our aunt." The little playmate was his cousin, Richmond Shakespear, whose death, deplored in a *Roundabout Paper*, took place two years before his own. In those days a visit to the enchained Emperor was a proper incident of travel, and a vision of the Corsican ogre was one of Thackeray's earliest and most vivid impressions. "Our ship touched at an island on the way home," he wrote, "where my black servant took me a long walk over rocks and hills until we reached a garden, where we saw a man walking. 'That's he,' said the black man: 'that is Bonaparte! He eats three sheep every day, and all the little children he can lay hands upon.'"

He arrived in England when "she was in mourning for the young Princess Charlotte, the hope of the Empire." Nor did he look again upon his native East. But its influence never left him. If his childish memory was vague and tear-bedimmed, the tradition of his family was strong and imperious. Moreover, the chain which bound him to India was not snapped by the homeward voyage. His guardian was his great-uncle, Peter Moore, who at Hadley Manor lived the life of a country gentleman, and lavishly spent the fortune he had so easily acquired

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in India. An active politician, Moore devoted many years to the support of the Whig party in the House of Commons, and, though he should have known better, joined in the pitiful attacks made upon Warren Hastings. But speculation was the real business of his life, and so keenly did he pursue it that he died at Abbeville an impoverished exile. His influence was not unimportant, since, as we may suppose, he quickened Thackeray's early impressions of India, while his career was doubtless the first romance in being that the boy had contemplated. At any rate, India is the vague background of more than one of Thackeray's novels, and Mr. Jos. Sedley, Colonel Newcome, and even Boggley Wollah and the Bundelcund Banking Company, are as near to fact as to fiction.

Like many another Anglo-Indian boy, Thackeray suffered ill-treatment and neglect at his first school, which was hard by Miss Pinkerton's at Chiswick, and which no doubt was kept in the fear of God by Dr. Swishtail. But in 1821 his mother returned from India, the wife of Major Carmichael Smyth, the kindest of stepfathers, and a year later Thackeray was sent to the Charterhouse. Here he remained six indolent years, and as the place is woven into the very web of his novels, this time of idleness was not wasted. No writer has ever been more loyal to his school than was Thackeray to the Charterhouse. It appears as Gray Friars or Slaughter House again and again; the best of his characters neglect the education that was there provided; and even his sympathy

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for Richard Steele is the keener, because the Christian Hero was once a gown boy at the old school.

But if the Charterhouse was a pleasant memory, the memory had mellowed with time. For Thackeray was not very happy at school, nor was the system of Dr. Russell, for a while triumphantly successful, likely to inspire an intelligent or imaginative boy. He learnt no Greek, he tells us, and little Latin. The famous scene in *Pendennis*, wherein Pendennis cannot construe the Greek play despite the prompting of Timmins, is drawn from life, and there can be no mistaking the Doctor's speech. "Pendennis, sir," said he, "your idleness is incorrigible and your stupidity beyond example. You are a disgrace to your school, and to your family, and I have no doubt will prove so in after-life to your country. . . . Miserable trifler! A boy who construes δε *and*, instead of δε *but*, at sixteen years of age, is guilty not merely of folly, and ignorance, and dulness inconceivable, but of crime, of deadly crime, of filial ingratitude, which I tremble to contemplate." The rhodomontade of the Doctor is confirmed by contemporaries. Dean Liddell, who "sat next" to Thackeray at school, has left a sketch of him. "He never attempted to learn the lesson," says the Dean, "never exerted himself to grapple with the Horace. We spent our time mostly in drawing, with such skill as we could command. His handiwork was very superior to mine, and his taste for comic scenes at that time exhibited itself in burlesque representations of Shakespeare. I remember one—Macbeth as a

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butcher brandishing two blood-reeking knives, and Lady Macbeth as a butcher's wife clapping him on the shoulder to encourage him." Thus the faculty of drawing declared itself early, as a few experiments remain to prove. But Dean Liddell repudiates the charge that he destroyed Thackeray's "opportunities of self-improvement" by doing his Latin verses.

For the rest, Thackeray, the schoolboy, appears to have been "pretty, gentle, and rather timid," as Venables, the smasher of his nose and his lifelong friend, describes him. He was never flogged, and only inspected the famous flogging-block "as an amateur." He had a taste for "pastry-cookery," and once consumed a half-a-crown's worth, "including ginger-beer." He had a still keener taste for reading, not the Latin and Greek books prescribed by his masters, but *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* by the author of *Waverley*, or *Life in London* by Pierce Egan. In other words, Dumbiedikes meant more to him than the Pious Æneas, and he professed a far deeper sympathy with Tom and Jerry, not forgetting Bob Logic, than with Cæsar crossing the Rubicon, or Hannibal splitting the Alps with vinegar. More than penny-tarts, more than games, he loved the novels of his boyhood. "I trouble you to find such novels in the present day!" he exclaims when, in his *De Juventute*, he glances back into the past. "O Scottish Chiefs, didn't we weep over you! O Mysteries of Udolpho, didn't I and Briggs Minor draw pictures out of you!" In fact, his was the childhood proper to a writer of

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romance, and if his career at school was undistinguished either by vice or virtue, it was by no means fruitless. The young Thackeray was already observant, and not only did he know how to use his eyes, but he could store up his experience. He, too, saw the celebrated fight between Berry and Biggs; he, too, rejoiced that at the 102d round Biggs, the bully, failed to come up to time; he, too, marvelled at the dignity of the head-boy, whom he confidently believed would be Prime Minister of England, and who, he was surprised to find in after-life, did not top six feet. Like unnumbered others, he remembered the time when the big boys wore moustaches and smoked cigars, and he cherished the memory—this one unique—of "old Hawkins," the cock of the school, who once thrashed a bargee at Jack Randall's in Slaughter House Lane. In brief, he carried from the Charterhouse the true flavour of the place, and if he left behind him all knowledge of the classics, he was already more apt for literature than the famous head-boy himself.

But he did not love the Charterhouse until he had created it for himself. Not even the presence of such friends as Liddell, Venables, and John Leech atoned for Russell's savagery. The Doctor's eye was always upon him, whom he denounced for "an idle, shuffling, profligate boy," and in the last letter written from school the boy desires nothing so much as a release from his bondage. "There are but three hundred and seventy in the school," he wrote; "I wish there were only three hundred and sixty-nine." So

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in 1828 he said a joyous good-bye to the Doctor, to Biggs and Berry and all the rest, and prepared himself with his stepfather's help to enter the University of Cambridge. Trinity was his college, and William Whewell was his tutor, and while he loved his college, he cherished neither sympathy nor respect for the great man who wrote *The Plurality of Worlds*. Crump, in *The Snob Papers*, the Grand Llama who would not permit an undergraduate to sit down in his presence, owes something to that Master of Trinity whom Sir Francis Doyle called "God's greatest work," and whom Thackeray attacked with a violence that was neither humorous nor just. Moreover, his brief sojourn at Cambridge—he stayed but four terms—was undistinguished. It has been told a dozen times how he was a bye-term man and took a fourth class in his May, but these details are of no importance: it is enough to remember that he belonged to as brilliant a set as has rarely illuminated either university, and that at Trinity he made his first experiments in literature.

The friend of Tennyson, FitzGerald, Monckton Milnes, and Kinglake—to say nothing of John Allen, Brookfield, and Kemble—was not likely to refrain his hand from the English language, and Thackeray's ambition was assured. It is characteristic that his first step was in the direction of university journalism, and he enhanced the vapid humour of *The Snob*[1] with

[1] "*The Snob*, a Literary Journal, not conducted by members of the University," was published by W. H. Smith of Rose Crescent in 1829. Eleven numbers appeared, of which the first was dated

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a few specimens of verse and prose. *Timbuctoo*, the parody of a prize poem, is his, and he ingenuously records how proud he was to hear it praised by those who knew not its authorship. It is not a sparkling travesty; indeed it is chiefly memorable because the subject, given out for the Chancellor's Medal, suggested a set of verses to Tennyson in which the master's genius is already revealed. Thackeray's, also, were the reflections of Dorothea Julia Ramsbottom, while he claimed with a proper pride the simple advertisement: "*Sidney Sussex College*.—Wanted a few Freshmen; please apply at the Buttery."

Once he had seen himself in print, Thackeray did not pause, and he claimed an active share in *The Gownsman*[1] which followed *The Snob*. There is noth-

April 9. Lettsom and Brookfield are reputed to have been its editors. In addition to the contributions mentioned above, Thackeray wrote a set of verses "To Geneviève," and is said to have written the whole of No. 8, with the editor's help, in five hours. Much ingenuity has been spent by bibliographers in detecting Thackeray's hand here or there. But the ingenuity is wasted, since the humour of *The Snob* does not even hold the promise of better things. It should be noted that "snob" in the cant of 1829 meant a townsman, and that the little journal was not the herald of *The Snob Papers*.

[1] Of *The Gownsman* seventeen numbers were published, the first on November 5, 1829, the last on February 25, 1830. A note in Edward FitzGerald's copy of *The Gownsman* suggested that the contributions signed θ were from the hand of Thackeray. But the matter was put beyond doubt by Mr. C. P. Johnson, who, writing in *The Athenæum*, April 30, 1887, pointed out that the manuscript of one of these contributions, a set of rhymes entitled "I'd be a Tadpole," existed in Mr. Sabin's possession, written and signed by Thackeray. All those, therefore, which are signed θ may confi-

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ing sparkling in its eighteen numbers, and the wonder is that it survived two terms. Meanwhile more serious projects engrossed him, and he destined a paper upon *The Revolt of Islam* for *The Chimæra*, a journal which never made its appearance. But with that zest of life which always distinguished him, he had other than literary interests. In his second year, we are told, he plunged into the many extravagances which presently involved Pendennis in ruin, and, like Pendennis, he profited enormously. Duns, no doubt, followed the purveyors of little dinners up his chastened staircase, and if he took his fate less tragically than Arthur Pendennis, he, too, suffered remorse and embarrassment. But the compensations were obvious. The friendships which he made ended only with his life, and he must have been noble, indeed, who was the friend of Alfred Tennyson and of Edward FitzGerald. Moreover, Cambridge taught him the literary use of the university, as the Charterhouse had taught him the literary use of a public school. In a few chapters of *Pendennis* he sketched the life of an undergraduate, which has eluded all his rivals save only Cuthbert Bede. He sketched it, moreover, in the true spirit of boyish extravagance, which he felt at Cambridge, and preserved even in the larger world of London; and if Trinity

dently be ascribed to Thackeray, and it is highly probable that he wrote others as well. Anthony Trollope, for instance, is doubtless right in giving him credit for the general dedication: "To all Proctors, past, present, and future, . . . whose taste it is our privilege to follow, whose virtue it is our duty to imitate, whose presence it is our interest to avoid." But the discussion is rather curious than profitable.

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and the rustling gown of Mr. Whewell had taught him nothing more than this, he would not have contemplated them in vain.

For Thackeray, while he had neglected scholarship, had already learnt the more valuable lessons of life and travel—lessons not one of which he forgot when he sat him down to the composition of fiction. Paris had always been familiar to him, and no sooner had he made up his mind to leave Cambridge than he set out—in 1830—for Germany. He visited Weimar, the quietude of whose tiny Court he celebrated when he drew his sketch of Pumpernickel and its society; and there he gave himself up to the study of German literature and to the worship of Goethe. Already his head was full of literary schemes. He would translate the German ballads into English, he would write a treatise upon German manners: in brief, he adopted and dismissed the innumerable projects which cloud the brain of ambitious youth. But, what is more important, he made his first entry into "society," and he saw Goethe. In *Fraser's Magazine* of January, 1840, there are some *Recollections* of Germany which may be ascribed to him, and in which are set forth the perturbation of a young student who confronts the pontiff of letters for the first time. But a letter, addressed to G. H. Lewes, presents a better picture, and proves that a quarter of a century had not dimmed the youthful impression.

"Five-and-twenty years ago," thus he wrote in 1855, "at least a score of young English lads used to live at Weimar for study, or sport, or society: all of

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which were to be had in the friendly little Saxon capital. The Grand Duke and Duchess received us with the kindliest hospitality. The Court was splendid, but most pleasant and homely. We were invited in our turn to dinners, balls, and assemblies there. Such young men as had a right appeared in uniforms, diplomatic and military. Some, I remember, invented gorgeous clothing: the kind old Hof-Marschall of those days, Monsieur de Spiegel (who had two of the most lovely daughters eyes ever looked on), being in no wise difficult as to the admission of these young Englanders." So Thackeray spent his days in the study of literature and in a pleasant hero-worship. He purchased Schiller's sword, and he saw Goethe. "Vidi tantum," said he; "I saw him but three times." But the image was ineffaceable. "Of course I remember well," again Thackeray speaks, "the perturbation of spirit with which, as a lad of nineteen, I received the long-expected intimation that the Herr Geheimrath would see me on such a morning. This notable audience took place in a little ante-chamber of his private apartments, covered all round with antique casts and bas-reliefs. He was habited in a long grey or drab redingote, with a white neckcloth and a red ribbon in his buttonhole. He kept his hands behind his back, as in Rauch's statuette. His complexion was very bright, clear, and rosy. His eyes extraordinarily dark, piercing, and brilliant. I felt quite afraid before them, and recollect comparing them to the eyes of the hero of a certain romance called *Melmoth the Wanderer*." But Thackeray was

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relieved to find that the great man spoke French with not a good accent, was emboldened to send him *Fraser's Magazine*, and heard with pride that he had deigned to look at some of his drawings. The meeting is a link in the unbroken chain of literary tradition, and it is not surprising that Thackeray should have guarded a proud memory of the poet who lit the torch of romanticism, then—in 1830—dazzling the eyes of Europe.

Meanwhile he was intent upon a profession. Though only twenty he reflected that at that age his father had seen five years' service, and the inaction irked him. Accordingly he chose the law, and read for a while in the chambers of Mr. Taprell, a well-known conveyancer. But the study of deeds did not long engross him. The few months which he spent in London were devoted to the companionship of his friends and to the practice of caricature. He smoked pipes with FitzGerald and Tennyson, he frequented the theatres with John Kemble, and under the auspices of Charles Buller he presently got his first insight into Radical politics. Indeed he gave his help in canvassing Liskeard for his friend, who sat on the Liberal side of the first reformed Parliament, and so well did the Cornish electors remember him that they would have elected him many years afterwards as their representative. But he tired of politics as speedily as of law, and went off to Paris to study painting and French literature. And then came the opportunity of journalism. He deserted the *atelier* of Gros (or another) for the office of *The National Standard*, and

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henceforth, save for a brief interval, he followed the trade of letters.

No writer has suffered more bitterly than Thackeray from the indiscreet zeal of admirers. Nothing that he ever wrote has seemed to the bibliographers too trivial for preservation. To "spot" his contributions to *Fraser's* and other magazines has become a kind of parlour game for the cultured, and since his death many pieces have been unearthed which he no doubt was happy to forget. The injustice of this practice is obvious. Thackeray had abundant time in which to collect the work by which he chose to be remembered, and no good purpose is served by the pious ingenuity of those who bind up into books the experiments in journalism overlooked by himself. The excellence of *Vanity Fair* imparts no quality to a set of articles contributed fifteen years previously to a dead newspaper. However, it is now idle to ignore his *juvenilia*, and though they throw little light upon his maturer works, as editors are wont to pretend, it may be said that he emerges from a trying ordeal far better than would the most of men. Literature was in his blood; he was born with a style which was neither involved nor extravagant; his apprenticeship to the other arts was an interlude; and at an age when most are wrestling with the stubbornness of our English tongue, he was already proprietor and editor of a newspaper.

Whatever we may think of the venture, we can have no doubt of Thackeray's courage and enterprise. To own and to edit a newspaper is always a desper-

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ate hazard, more easily faced, it is true, with the half-conscious recklessness of youth than with the settled calm of maturer years. Now, Thackeray was no more than twenty-one when he purchased and managed *The National Standard*, a paper which had survived eighteen numbers without distinction. Its editor had been Mr. F. W. M. Bayley, and Thackeray noted the transference of responsibility with an expected quip. "We have got rid of the old Bailey," said he, "and changed the governor." The change availed him as little as his energy. He not only edited the paper—he wrote for it, he illustrated it, he supplied it with foreign correspondence. Neither his drawings nor his articles do him much credit. They are youthful chiefly in their immaturity. No doubt they appealed pleasantly to the taste of the time at which they were written. The Romantic movement in France had encouraged a love of whatever was strange or supernatural, and we find Thackeray caught up, against his wont, in the humour of the moment. Now he is found translating Hoffman and *The Mahabarata*, or sketching the Charruas Indians at the inspiration of the ingenious Janin. Now he essays a story of his own, and in *The Devil's Wager*, afterwards adapted for *The Paris Sketchbook*, proves that he, commonly untouched by movements, felt at least a side-wind of romanticism. But all in vain.

The National Standard was "hauled down," to use his own phrase, after it had floated but a few months in the breeze, and Thackeray, thrown back upon painting, worked in the studios of Brine and

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Gros, or copied the Old Masters industriously in the Louvre. Meantime he continued to make experiments in literature, found his way to the office of *Fraser's Magazine*, and was buying experience at not too high a rate. His own experience was doubtless that of Mr. Batchelor in *Lovel the Widower*. That unfortunate gentleman, it will be remembered, purchased *The Museum* from his friend Honeyman, who "was in dreadful straits for money," and a "queer wine-merchant and bill-discounter" named Sherrick. Thackeray, like Batchelor, "gave himself airs as editor"—that is certain. He, too, "proposed to educate the public taste, to diffuse morality and sound literature throughout the nation." But his fortune was not yet exhausted; the gutters of Fleet Street still yawned; and what had been saved from *The National Standard* was presently engulfed by the hapless *Constitutional*.

While Thackeray had squandered a part of his patrimony, his stepfather, Major Carmichael Smyth, had made unlucky investments, and father and son, whose equal friendship suggests the tie which bound Clive Newcome to the Colonel, collaborated in founding a Radical paper. Such heavy artillery as Grote and Molesworth came to their aid, and the banner under which they fought bore the proud title of *The Constitutional*. Thackeray was appointed correspondent in Paris, where for some six months he discharged his duties in the proper spirit of Radicalism. No doubt he was influenced by his journal; no doubt the consciousness that the austere Grote had his eye upon

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him encouraged him to dulness. But the truth is that Thackeray's letters to *The Constitutional* are particularly grave. They express the commonplaces of his party. The misdemeanours of Louis Philippe are sternly admonished, and the easy escape of Louis Napoleon after the descent upon Strassburg naturally suggests that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor. Yet *The Constitutional* proves clearly enough that Thackeray was a competent journalist. His work may not be absolutely intelligent; it is nevertheless remarkable that a man of twenty-five should write with so stern a repression of himself. The letters have very little fancy; their style is of the tamest; and though Thackeray knew the temper of the Parisians well enough, though he foresaw the downfall of the Orleans family, his gift of prophecy is not brilliant. But he had the trick of leader-writing, and had he not been a humourist, he might have made the columns of *The Times* reverberate with its own kind of thunder.

The downfall of *The Constitutional* rendered Thackeray penniless. The rupees gathered in India were all dissipated in journalism and gambling. While Fleet Street had swallowed much, the card-table had also claimed its share. The fate of Mr. Dawkins, who lost his fortune to the ingenious Mr. Deuceace, had been Thackeray's own. "I have not seen that man," he told Sir Theodore Martin of a gambler at Spa, "since he drove me down in his cabriolet to my banker's in the City, where I sold out my patrimony and handed it over to him." But not only had he

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lost his patrimony; he had incurred an added responsibility, having married Miss Creagh Shawe, a lady of Doneraile, at the British Embassy in Paris; so that in 1837, when he returned to London and the magazines, he was no better off than other adventurers who work for their bread. Indeed, as he told Mrs. Brookfield, he once wrote with Longueville Jones in *Galignani's Messenger* for ten francs a-day, and he installed himself in Great Coram Street without a very clear prospect of success.

But temperament and experience were in his favour. He was far better equipped for the craft of letters than the most of his contemporaries. He knew something of the great world which lies beyond Cambridge and London; he had studied the life of foreign cities; and he had sojourned in no place which had not contributed something to the material of his art. Being no recluse, he had always mixed freely with his fellows: he was as familiar with such haunts as the Cider Cellars and the Coal Hole as with the stolid mansions of Bloomsbury or the more elegant palaces of Belgravia. The fact that at five-and-twenty he had got rid of a comfortable fortune proves that he faced life with a certain recklessness, and his intelligence was warrant enough that the money had not been squandered in vain. Nor was his temperament less happy than his education. Energy, courage, and good spirits were his. In the letters of FitzGerald you get a glimpse of him, pleasure-loving, humorous, and alert. Now he is pouring contempt upon the works of Raphael, now he is poking fun at

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Spedding's venerable forehead, which he and Fitz-Gerald "found somehow or other in all things, just peering out of all things." Thackeray saw it in a milestone. "He also drew the forehead rising with a sober light over Mont Blanc, and reflected in the Lake of Geneva." And his character, joyous and confident, was not hidden from those who saw him. It shines boldly in his aspect, as it is revealed by Maclise in his drawing of the Fraserians. A big burly man he was—Carlyle a few years later described him as "a half-monstrous Cornish giant"—with a mass of hair kempt or unkempt in the romantic fashion, a high-stock about his neck, and an eye-glass stuck insolently in his eye. Old for his years in looks as in experience, he held his own with such captains of the press as Lockhart and Maginn, and was ready to engage in the violent warfare of letters with as fine a spirit as any of them.

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CHAPTER II

THACKERAY IN LONDON. THE TOWN AND TASTE OF HIS TIME

WHEN Thackeray came to seek his fortune in London, Queen Victoria had just ascended the throne, but the view of life generally known as Early Victorian was already fashionable. The excesses of the Dandies had suffered the natural reaction: elegance was replaced by a certain coarseness, of which an exaggerated sentimentality was a necessary part. Elegance is apt to be heartless, while coarseness finds an excuse in a noisy appeal to the more obvious emotions, and the emotions of 1837 were neither subtle nor restrained. It was an age, in fact, which saw D'Orsay disputing the sovereignty of Red Herrings, and which found a satisfaction in unctuously deploring that nobleman's lapses from the path of virtue. Commercial prosperity, moreover, had diffused whatever culture the epoch might boast, and the culture had become all the thinner for the diffusion. Wealth, divorced from manners and intelligence, marked the rise to power of the great middle class, while railways[1] drove the country still farther on the road to

[1] Charles Greville describes how, on July 18, 1837, he entered a train for the first time. He records that "the first sensation is a slight degree of nervousness, and a feeling of being run away

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democracy. An increase in the number of clubs proves that a desire of social success was general, and assuredly the chronicler of snobs found his material ready to his hand. For the vast fortunes acquired by industry threatened to overshadow the eminence of birth or talent, and the Young England movement, which startled England some seven years later, was but a protest of the upper and lower classes against the domination of the prosperous and arrogant class which came between them.

The popular amusements suffered a like decay. Eccentricity and exoticism seemed of higher account than beauty and good sense. The Back Kitchen and the Cave of Harmony, to give them Thackeray's own titles, were the most eagerly frequented haunts of the day, and though of their kind they were excellent, they did not illustrate the virtue of elegance and refinement. But their sudden rise to popularity is an interesting chapter in the history of manners, and no writer has pictured them more vividly than Thackeray. They were, like their age, strange mixtures of blackguardism and sentiment. Heartrending allusions to angels alternated in their songs with such pieces of brutal realism as *Sam Hall* or *The Body-Snatcher*. The celebrated Hodgen, who sang this blood-curdling masterpiece to Pendennis and Warrington in the Back Kitchen, appeared "sitting on a coffin, with a flask

with, but a sense of security soon supervenes, and the velocity is delightful." He also tells us, with what to-day appears ingenuousness, that an engineer was turned off by the company for going at the rate of forty-five miles an hour.

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of gin before him, with a spade, and a candle stuck in a skull." The very glasses quivered on the table as with terror, and no other singer had a chance against the Snatcher.

The haunts themselves were appropriate to their entertainment. They were commonly long rooms, running along the first floor of public-houses, and while the chairman smiled blandly at the end of a long table, and flourished a portentous cigar, his customers supped or sipped their brandy-and-water. For many years there were no regular singers; visitors "obliged" as complaisantly as did Colonel Newcome before his ears were shocked by ribaldry, and the few artists engaged were content with three or four shillings a-week, with a screw of tobacco thrown in. Now and again, however, a star arose above the horizon, a star such as the famous John W. Sharp,[1] who in Thackeray's day shone brilliantly upon the Cave of Harmony. *Jim Crow*, as he sang it after the American Rice, is still a splendid memory, and one is not surprised that the chairman's announcement,

[1] John W. Sharp was for long the King of the Concert-Room, and Thackeray must have known him well. He made his first appearance at Evans's in 1839, and attracted crowds thither for some seven years. He shared a lodging at Hampstead with Labern, a rascal who knew better than any of his contemporaries how to write a popular song, and after the manner of their kind they travelled the same road to the devil. During an interlude John W. Sharp managed the Lord Nelson Music Hall in Euston Square, where he sang the Corsican Brothers and Paul Pry in character. He died in 1856, and was by far the most accomplished and engaging of his class.

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"I claim your attention for a comic song from Mr. Sharp," was greeted with immense applause. But, like Mr. Hodgen, John W. Sharp retired presently to Vauxhall Gardens; and so long as the great Labern was sober enough to write his songs, he triumphed over all audiences with a daring mixture of savagery and pathos, which is as intimately characteristic of his age as the early romances of Sir Edward Bulwer.

The literary world differed little enough from the world of society: for all its noble sentiments, it was marked by bad taste and lack of restraint. The reputation of Scott had got its second wind, so to say, but the other great men were either forgotten or ill-considered. Coleridge and Lamb belonged to the previous generation, and Dickens was only just rising above the horizon. *Sketches by Boz* had heralded a new talent, and *Pickwick* was already on the road to immortality. Indeed, Thackeray, as he confessed many years afterwards at a dinner of the Royal Academy, had carried a bundle of sketches up to Furnivall's Inn after Seymour's suicide, and had applied to the youthful Dickens for the post of illustrator. But the year of Victoria's accession to the throne held very little of hope or promise. Literature had become less an art than a fashionable pastime. Lord Byron had shown the world that a title was not incompatible with genius, and many a sprig of nobility thought that the certainty of genius resided in his birth. That amusing humbug, Don Telesforo de Trueba y Cosio, had startled the town with *The Incognito, or Sins and Peccadillos*, while Lord Mulgrave

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hoped that his title might atone for such stuff as *Matilda* and *The Contrast*. Sir Egerton Brydges had proved that mechanical industry might turn out sonnets, or achieve epics, while Sir Edward Bulwer was eloquently testifying that nothing was impossible to a new-made baronet. Even the Dandies were incomplete if they had put no volume to their credit, and it redounds to the honour of the peerless D'Orsay that he did not essay literature as well as the other arts.

For Lady Blessington's industry an ample excuse may be found: hers was the facility of a sanguine Irish brain, and in the *Keepsakes* and *Books of Beauty* she crystallised the prevailing taste with an ingenious lack of humour. In truth, no age ever parodied itself more prettily than did this one in its vapid bundles of poetry and portraiture. The lady who languished in a "bertha" worried the Muses with the same careless effrontery as the fop who ruffled it in the coats of Stultz. And if perchance an author might boast no title, there were nobles enough among the characters of a popular novel to fill the House of Lords or pack the country houses of England. In Miss Landon's *Ethel Churchill*—to take a casual instance—the reader is introduced to Lord Wharton, to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, to Alexander Pope himself, and it was *Ethel Churchill* which Thackeray himself approved with more than half his heart in the savage columns of *Fraser's*.

But mixed up with the popular gentility was a keen enjoyment of "low life." The coarseness in man-

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ners which, I have said, is the natural companion of sentimentality, was equally matched by a coarseness in literature. Pelham is not content to be a "gentleman"; he must also patter the flash; and while the hero masqueraded as a cracksman, so the cracksman seemed a hero to the sentimental novelist. "The ruffian cly thee Guinea Pig, for stashing the lush" is as intimately a part of Bulwer's work as such examples of hysteria as, "O that woman's love! how strong it is in its weakness! how beautiful in its guilt!" But Ainsworth played the game with more fancy, and with a better success than Bulwer. For Ainsworth's highwaymen are all marvels of sensibility; his very housebreakers crack their cribs with the best of motives, and wipe away a tear of heart-broken regret as they go off with the swag.

And side by side with a fiction made ridiculous by false sentiment, there flourished a method of criticism which knew no sentiment at all. Bulwer was nothing if not genteel; there was little gentility in Macaulay or Croker, in Lockhart or Maginn. Such critics as these attacked their victim with the gloves off, nor did they hesitate to punish literary incompetence with a ferocity which the worst vices might have inspired. Flouts and gibes were better to their purpose than solid argument, and on occasion the best of them did not shrink from gross personalities. Lockhart, "the Scorpion that delighteth to sting the faces of men," had the prettiest method, while Croker outdid them all, even Maginn himself, in brutality. The Secretary to the Admiralty, not content with charg-

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ing Lady Morgan with "licentiousness, profligacy, irreverence, blasphemy, libertinism, disloyalty, and atheism," topped it all by calling her "a female Methuselah." And if Maginn's savage attack upon Grantley Berkeley were abundantly justified, no one can help regretting the bad manners wherewith it was conducted.

But the ferocity of the early Victorian critics is easily explained. Party spirit ran high, and neither Tory nor Whig could discover a speck of worth in his opposite. While *The Edinburgh* was steadfast in the opinion that Tories were as destitute of literary talent as of moral rectitude, *Blackwood's*, *Fraser's*, and *The Quarterly* were prepared to slaughter Whig poets and Whig politicians in the name of patriotism. Macaulay's onslaught upon Croker's *Boswell* is superior in taste alone to Croker's own bludgeonings, and the worst of Hazlitt's excesses did not justify the monstrous contempt of Maginn and his band.[1] Moreover, there is another excuse for the insolence which prevailed. The best of the critics were scholars

[1] The savagery which was popular when Thackeray came to London was no new thing. The critics had been straining their vocabulary for more than five-and-twenty years. Maginn, writing to William Blackwood in 1823, says of Hazlitt, "You have called him pimpled, affected, ignorant, a Cockney scribbler, etc., but what is that to what he has said of the most brilliant men of the age? Hook-nosed Wellington, vulture-beaked Southey, hanging-browed Croker, down-looking Jack Murray, and Mudford fat as fleecy-hosiery." Here the advantage is on Hazlitt's side. But the habit of abuse had not grown weaker with time, and it culminated in *Fraser's Magazine*.

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and men of taste, who were not unnaturally lashed to fury at the praises ignobly lavished upon amateurs. Whenever they remembered that literature and politics were not indissolubly connected, their slashings were justified, and it may wisely be pleaded in their defence that they held aloft the banner of their calling. Their most heinous fault, then, was a fault of manners, not of intelligence, and the memory of such critics as Hazlitt and Macaulay, Lockhart and Maginn, will be secure when the names of many victims whose vanity they ridiculed are lost in oblivion. Had it not been for *The Edinburgh* who would ever have heard of Montgomery?

Such was the world of letters into which Thackeray came, and his attitude from the first was an attitude of protest, as, indeed, we should expect of a writer whose humour and outlook, when they were not his own, were borrowed from the eighteenth century. It was a strange accident that enrolled him under Fraser's flag; but though he was a Whig fighting on the side of High-Toryism, he remained loyal at once to himself and his colleagues. His criticism was seldom coloured by his environment. Maybe he praised Miss Landon, who was a favourite of Maginn's, more highly than he would have done, had he enjoyed the freedom of another magazine. It is possible that had he written elsewhere he would not have detected "a hundred beautiful poems" in *Ethel Churchill;* but it chimed exactly with his taste and temper to demolish Bulwer and Ainsworth, and them he demolished with the best of spirits. However, it

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was probably the influence of Maginn which attracted Thackeray to *Fraser's*. He had met this gay and dashing free-lance as early as 1832, so that when he began gravely to write for the magazines the acquaintance was already of some years' standing. At the outset he was charmed, like many another, with the brilliant talk and enthusiastic scholarship of Maginn, who taught him, he tells us, to appreciate Homer, and engaged him to read a passage every day.

But not only had he known Maginn; when he returned to London in 1837 he had already tried his pen in the pages of *Regina*, as the initiate were pleased to call the magazine. His contributions to *Fraser's* have not all been identified, and perhaps it is as well they should be left hidden where they admirably served their turn. Yet there is little doubt that *Elizabeth Brownrigge: a Tale*, in which the *lusus naturæ* school of literature, and its prime example, *Eugene Aram*, are burlesqued, is from Thackeray's hand. It betrays his touch in matter as in manner; and since it was published, in 1832, a few months after his early meeting with Maginn, it must e'en have been composed in a first flush of enthusiasm. A piece or two followed in 1834 and 1835, and, as has been said, Thackeray appears in Maclise's group of the Fraserians; but from 1837 onwards he is steadfast in loyalty, and after that year Oliver Yorke had no better supporter.

He wrote under many names, by this time familiar —M. A. Titmarsh, Jeames Yellowplush, Fitz-

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Boodle, Dolly Duster, and what not. He turned his facile hand to anything: stories, criticism of books and pictures, correspondence from Paris—he managed them all with gaiety and address. The sentimental ruffian was the favourite object of his attack, and it is not strange that the champion of Fielding's irony should run atilt at Bulwer and Ainsworth. Now he throws his criticism into the shape of a story, now he lets Jeames Yellowplush wield the tomahawk for him. He was savage, like his colleagues—too savage, he afterwards confessed to Bulwer with an apology; but it must be said in his defence that time has amply justified whatever savagery he displayed. Oddly enough, it was the painters who found the greater offence in his criticism, and they were angry without warrant.[1] For never was there a more amiable and misguided judge of the pictorial art. Yet Thackeray had painted in the studios, he had copied in the Louvre, he was indefatigable in the illustration of what he saw. But he took no more into a picture-gallery than a trick of picturesque prose, a faculty of indiscreet appreciation, much prudery, and a good heart.

The sentiment with which he examined a picture was irreproachable; the keenness wherewith he looked through the paint and canvas to the purpose behind it is miraculous; "the intention of Mulready's *Seven Ages*," says he, "is godlike." He protests, like the Early Victorian that he was, against Etty's nudity: a Sleeping Nymph he finds so naked "as to be unfit for

[1] See *FitzGerald's Letters* (1894), vol. i. p. 193.

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appearance among respectable people at an exhibition." Alas, for the respectable people of 1838! But not only does he espy the disease; he discovers a remedy: "A large curtain of fig-leaves should be hung over every one of Etty's pictures, and the world should pass on, content to know that there are some glorious colours beneath." That is prudishness reduced to the absurd. One doubts whether even the respectable Victorians would have found pleasure in the knowledge that somewhere or other a mass of glorious colour was covered by fig-leaves. But Etty "offended propriety" as badly as David or Girodet, and there was an end on't.

However, if Etty was rather too "human," the classics were not human enough, and Thackeray's scorn of the cold, marmoreal Greeks was eloquent even for his age. The Gothic cult, encouraged by the Romantic movement, inspired him to an excess of zeal, to an outbreak of sentiment, which to-day are hardly intelligible. "The contemplation of such specimens of Greek art as we possess hath always, to tell the truth, left us in a state of unpleasant wonderment and perplexity. It carries corporeal beauty to a pitch of painful perfection, and deifies the body and bones truly; but, by dint of sheer beauty, it leaves humanity altogether inhuman—quite heartless and passionless." Thus Thackeray at a moment when we "possessed" the Elgin Marbles! Mere beauty, in his view, should be fig-leaved as tightly as mere colour, and the world be free to admire the school which teaches that "love is the first and highest ele-

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ment of beauty in art." Nor is this the worst; his hint to amateurs concerning pictures and their merits is, "Look to have your heart touched by them." So, too, he finds a picture by Eastlake "as pure as a Sabbath hymn sung by the voices of children," and would reserve "one of the best places in the gallery" for the coldly chaste productions of Ary Scheffer. With the same sentimentality of purpose he thinks William Hunt as good as Hogarth, and objects to Delacroix with the irrelevant question, "What's the use of being uncomfortable?" "Skill and handling are great parts of a painter's trade, but heart is the first," thus he sums up the question; "this is God's direct gift to him, and cannot be got in any academy, or under any master;" and never elsewhere does he more clearly acknowledge the limitations imposed upon him by his age. Many months passed in the studios of Paris had taught him no more than a jargon which Ruskin adopted as his own, and the appreciation of a certain M. Biard, whose "Slave Trade"—now happily forgotten—seems to have shaken London to its very foundations. But the criticism of painting did not long engross Thackeray, who was trying his hand at the art of fiction, and who had already won the praise of his friends, though the approval of the people, in his own view the best judges, was withheld for a weary ten years.

But if his stories did not please the people, they afforded the best possible training to himself. Not only did they give him the experience which he lacked, but they were, so to say, sketches for his

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larger works. The same characters, the same names, the same situations were afterwards used by him with more conspicuous success. *A Shabby Genteel Story* grew into *Philip*, and though the process is not always so clearly visible, the stories contributed obscurely to *Fraser's* and *The New Monthly* were the germs of the novels which won for Thackeray his fame and name. But the stories are best worth studying, because they prove that he was at the outset inspired by the views which characterised his maturer talent. A strange mixture of contemptuous irony and that particular kind of sentimentalism known as Early Victorian, he seems to snigger behind his sobs, and to weep under the secure cover of contemptuous irony. The worst is that he could not, either early or late, keep his two methods separate, so that while his pathos does not melt the wise to tears, his irony is seldom sustained at a perfect level. *Catherine*,[1] for instance, is excused on the ground that it was written "to counteract the injurious influence of some popular fictions of the day, which made heroes of highwaymen and burglars, and created a false sympathy for the vicious and criminal." But if the excuse strikes a false note, what shall we say of a writer who, in attempting an ironic presentation, declares that "though we are only in the third chapter of this history, we feel almost sick of the characters that appear in it, and the adventures which they are called upon to go through"?

[1] *Catherine* appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1839–40, and was not published in a book until 1869, when it was included in volume 22 of the Library Edition.

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Such a confession as this produces precisely the effect which Thackeray wishes to avoid. It introduces an element of morality into a scene which is only reputable if moral and immoral have changed places. Fielding in *Jonathan Wild* lashes no other character with the scorn of his disapproval than Heartfree, whose behaviour is "low and pitiful," and whose wretched soliloquy is properly described as "full of low and base ideas, without a syllable of greatness." In truth, irony can only exist in a uniform atmosphere: given Fielding's definition of greatness, *Jonathan Wild* is a masterpiece of wit. But introduce into that masterpiece digressions upon right and wrong in their usual acceptation, and you get a confusion of epithets, an inextricable jumble of two languages. Now, this is the too frequent fault of Thackeray's experiments in irony: by suddenly changing the atmosphere of his stories, he involves himself in the same charge, which he brings with some justice against Bulwer and Ainsworth. So often does he halt between the two methods of expression, that his meaning, doubtful to himself, is obscure to others. More than once he discusses Catherine as though she were not an instrument of irony but a living person. He confesses that the story was "a mistake all through. It was not made disgusting enough; . . . the author had a sneaking kindness for his heroine, and did not like to make her quite worthless."

But the true ironist is impartial: he should permit no hint to escape him of kindness or disgust; he should put the crimes of his hero or heroine in the

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light of achievements; and he should rise superior to the temptation of commentary. If in one sense *Catherine* is not disgusting enough, in another it is too disgusting. The author's intermittent partiality increases the realism of the story, and that which should be merely intellectual wears a semblance of morality. Nor did Thackeray make the best of his material: the life of Catherine Hayes, "the traitoress of Birmingham," as it is told in the bald simplicity of *The Newgate Calendar*, grips a firmer hold upon the fancy than Thackeray's satire, which is chiefly interesting as a step on the road towards the excellence of *Barry Lyndon*. For Catherine Hayes was a very real personage, who murdered her weak, adoring husband with a cold-blooded atrocity rare even in the eighteenth century, and who was burned alive for "petty treason" in 1726. Yet though the story was thus faithfully founded upon fact, it was construed as a deliberate attack upon Miss Catherine Hayes, the Irish singer, and the Press of Ireland was fiercely indignant. In a ballad, which he wrote at the time, and sent many years after to Miss Procter, Thackeray celebrated the episode;

"A Saxon who thinks that he dthraws
Our porthraits as loike as two pays,
Insulted one day without cause
Our innocent singer, Miss Hayes.

"And though he meant somebody else
(At layst so the raycreant says,
Declaring that history tells
Of another, a wicked Miss Hayes),

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"Yet Ireland, the free and the brave,
Says, what's that to do with the case?
How dare he, the cowardly slave,
To mintion the name of a Hayes?

* * * * * *

"*The Freeman* in language refined,
The Post whom no prayer can appayse,
Lashed fiercely the wretch who maligned
The innocent name of a Hayes.

* * * * * *

"Accursed let his memory be,
Who dares to say aught in dispraise
Of Oireland, the land of the free,
And of beauty and janius and Hayes."

Nor did the trouble end here. Some ten years later a set of young Irishmen[1] determined that Thackeray had made a deliberate attempt to ruin their distinguished countrywoman; and in revenge they deputed a young gentleman to take lodgings opposite the novelist's house, and await an opportunity of chastising him. But Thackeray carried the war into the enemy's camp: he called upon the enraged Irishman, told him the true history of the wicked Catherine Hayes, and sent him back to Ireland without a thought of revenge in his head. The anecdote is characteristic of either side, and is the pleasantest incident in the career, real or imagined, of Catherine Hayes.

Burlesque is bastard brother to irony, and if *The*

[1] This suggestion to horsewhip Thackeray was made after a reference to Catherine Hayes in *Pendennis;* but the real offence was committed in the earlier story, and therefore it is most properly discussed here. See *Morning Chronicle*, April 12, 1850, *Capers and Anchovies*, a piece of controversy in Thackeray's best manner.

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Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan are burlesque at its maddest, the two methods are agreeably blended in *The Yellowplush Papers*, which also first sparkled in the pages of *Fraser's*. Now, when Jeames is a pseudonym for the author, he is nothing more than an excuse for bad spelling. (In his inception he was called Charles, but it was as Jeames that he rose to grandeur, and should be remembered.) His views are the views not of a flunkey, but of Thackeray himself. His *Letters to the Literati*, for instance, throw no light upon his character, they mark no point in his progress. They do but assail the "Honrabble Barnet" in terms of deeper contempt than Thackeray would have used, had he written in his own name and with his own pen. We may therefore dismiss all those essays in which the name of Yellowplush is usurped, and consider only such pages as throw the light of autobiography upon the ingenious flunkey.

Jeames, indeed, is an engaging figure, and no sooner does he step upon the stage than he wins our sympathy. For he, too, is painted in the colours of irony, and owes something of his character to the Dean of St. Patrick's. It has been said that he was drawn, as he appeared in Buckley Square, after Mr. Foster, the gentleman who for many years contributed the Fashionable Intelligence to *The Morning Post*. But this is incredible: from the first day that he encountered Mr. Altamont, he has the makings of a genuine flunkey, whom you could not match outside the famous *Directions to Servants*. At the outset he adopted the right attitude of snobbery towards his own kind—"them

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poor disrepattable creatures" he loftily calls them. No sooner does he take service with Mr. Deuceace than he reveals a sound knowledge of his craft. "When you carry up a dish of meat,"—thus the footman is enjoined by Swift,—"dip your fingers in the sauce, or lick it with your tongue, to try whether it be good, and fit for your master's table." And Jeames had already turned this philosophy into practice. "There wasn't a bottle of wine," says he, "that we didn't get a glass out of, nor a pound of sugar that we didn't have some lumps of it." "We had keys to all the cubbards—we pipped into all the letters that kem and went—we pored over all the bill-files—we'd the best pickens out of the dinners, the livvers of the fowls, the forcemit balls out of the soup, the egs from the sallit." All this they had as their rights, for "a suvvant's purquisits is as sacred as the laws of Hengland."

But if Jeames knew his rights, he knew also his master's character. The Honrabble Halgernon was a gambler and a swindler—that his servant saw; but he recognised that rank and birth can warrant the last enormity. Yellowplush, then, is already a true footman in *Miss Shum's Husband*, that story of a taboo, which may best be described as a modern *Cupid and Psyche*, and he is a still finer expert in *Mr. Deuceace's Amours*. But it is not until he signs himself Fitz James de la Pluche[1] that he does perfect

[1] The earlier series of *Yellowplush Papers* was printed in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1837–38, and republished in the *Comic Tales and Sketches* of 1841. *The Diary of C. Jeames de la Pluche* did not

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justice to his talents. At last he was in the situation which the author was best pleased to depict. He was rising from one world to another, he was deserting the servants'-hall for the drawing-room, and exchanging the fidelity of Mary Ann for the sly contempt of Lady Angelina. He had become as fierce a gambler as Mr. Deuceace himself; but it was not the cards that tempted him—it was the railroads of England; and he played with such brilliant luck that before long he was "a landed propriator— a Deppaty Leftnant—a Capting." Under the auspices of his friend, Lord Bareacres, he is presented at Court, wearing upon his handsome brow the Halbert 'At—"an 'at which is dear to the memory of hevery Brittn; an 'at which was invented by my Feald Marshle, and adord Prins." However, the fall in railway-stock is too much for the heroic de la Pluche: with a note of warning against time-bargains, he retires from the business of speculation, and settles down with the still faithful Mary Hann at the "Wheel of Fortune 'Otel." His name is simple Jeames Plush once more, and he comes off better than most upstarts. But his humour grows with the years, and proves that Thackeray was a more highly accomplished master of his material in 1845 than when he first came upon the town.

appear in *Punch* until 1845–46, and having been published by Appleton of New York in 1853, first found its way into a volume, on this side the Atlantic, in the Library Edition of 1869. But since the later is a development of the earlier work, they are considered together in this place.

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But the sentimental stories which he contributed in these early days to the magazines are yet more closely characteristic of his talent, yet more loudly prophetic of what he was presently to achieve. In *A Shabby Genteel Story*[1] the snob, as he saw him, is already triumphant. Already he can exclaim with rapture, "O, free and happy Britons, what a miserable, truckling, cringing race ye are!" Already he is eloquent in denunciation of the tuft-hunter, the lick-spittle, the sneak, "the man of a decent middle rank, who affects to despise it, and herds only with persons of the fashion." The author's suspicion of snobbishness is too alert, as it was in the after-time; his censure of the harmless vanity displayed by foolish men and women is too savage; the pretensions of Mrs. Gann are treated with too heavy a hand. But in *A Shabby Genteel Story* we see the beginning of a talent, exercised in the direction which it would always take, and misapplied with a wilfulness which was constant. Between *A Shabby Genteel Story* and *Philip* are many works worthily accomplished; yet a comparison of the two proves that what Thackeray was in 1840 that he remained in 1861. His style had gained an immeasurable ease; his view of life was more settled, if no less sentimental. But the same drama still attracted him: he was still happiest in the contemplation of the petty problems which agitate the minds of snobs, and so profound was his consistency that he closed his career with the same

[1] This story was published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1840, and reprinted in the *Miscellanies* of 1855–57.

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gospel wherewith twenty years before he had commenced it.

A better story both in style and composition is *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*.[1] Here, at any rate, is a promise of the best that was to come; here, at last, is something besides gaiety of heart and a sense of social contrast. Of course the social contrast is still the essence of the story, but the humour and pathos, which particularly distinguished Thackeray, are agreeably blended, and there is undoubtedly a freshness in the telling that should have pleased the jaded taste of the time. However, the positive achievement of Thackeray's early experiments in fiction is not great; the most of them might well have been forgotten, and forgotten they would have been, had not a tiresome fashion of curiosity necessitated, as I have said, the patient collection of the odds and ends contributed to the magazines. But though at the moment they brought their author no fame and little profit, they were not written in vain. Even had they been lost, they would still have served their purpose in sharpening the tools which he would presently use with greater ease and skill.

Above all, they show that Thackeray was not piping to the tune of the time. Andrea Fitch, in *A Shabby Genteel Story*, is a true child of 1830, Spanish cloak, fragrant Oronoko and all; there are traces of

[1] *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* made its first appearance in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1841, and was published as a book eight years later.

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French influence in his contributions to *The National Standard;* but for the rest Thackeray cared as little for the Romantic Movement as for the performances of Bulwer and Ainsworth. As Dickens went back to the life of an earlier age, to our English lanes and English inns, so Thackeray sought inspiration in an earlier literature, and is far more closely related to Goldsmith and Fielding than to his fantastic contemporaries. He seems to have come straight out of the eighteenth century, and to have blotted from his sight the pearls of fancy with which his contemporaries adorned their works. It is not wonderful, therefore, that he did not command popularity. A generation which delighted in titled authors and ruffianly heroes took small pleasure in the sentimental simplicity of *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, nor are you surprised that the publishers of the magazine in which it appeared demanded of its author a speedy termination. But, for all that, Thackeray was not discouraged. His buoyant temper could easily support the disdain of the people, especially as his friends were eager in appreciation. The chastened approval of FitzGerald, given to few, was surely enough to justify high hopes of the future, especially since Tennyson and Carlyle agreed with FitzGerald. Sterling, no doubt, overdid his praise, when he wondered whether Fielding or Goldsmith had done better than *The Great Hoggarty Diamond;* but at least he had noted Thackeray's inspiration, and saw in which direction his friend's talent should develop.

So the year 1841 found Thackeray with an empty

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pocket, yet rich in the applause of his friends and in the qualified approval of magazine-editors. But a blow had fallen upon him, which literary success could not soften. His wife, to whom he had been married but a few short years, fell suddenly ill, and though Thackeray hoped for a recovery until 1844, she did not leave the *maison de santé* to which she had been entrusted, and was never restored to health. That Thackeray never ceased to mourn his broken life is certain. "Though my marriage was a wreck," he wrote long afterwards, "I would do it over again, for behold love is the crown and completion of all earthly good." Nor was his wife's illness the only sorrow which beset him. An infant daughter had died in the year before, an event to which there is a touching reference in *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, while poverty intensified the melancholy of a reserved and sensitive man. Thus Thackeray's period of experiment ended in sorrow and ill-success, for which he would have been the last to claim a general sympathy. So far as one can tell from the scanty references in FitzGerald's *Letters* and elsewhere, he was resolute to hide his troubles from his friends, and he sought in work and travel the surest solace of all. Those near to him knew the courage with which he bore the assaults of adverse fortune; but as he says himself, "such things are sacred and secret," and a stranger "has no business to place them on paper for all the world to read."

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CHAPTER III

THE PICTURESQUE REPORTER—*BARRY LYNDON*

We are nowadays so intimately acquainted with the picturesque reporter, that we can hardly believe in a time when he was not. He is the favourite of the daily press, the one serious rival to the popular novelist. He may be discovered, note-book in hand, wherever steamboat or railroad can carry him. Now he is greedily intent upon information; now his aim is to capture such random reflections as grow, like wild-flowers, in the hedgerow. But whether it be thought or fact which engages his mind, the result is most often both trivial and transitory. He has seldom the tact or the leisure to see, and he is perforce content with hasty generalisations. He mistakes that which happens once for an invariable circumstance, and an impolite porter is enough to involve in a common charge a whole nation. So that while the literature of "tourism" is ever increasing, it cannot inflate our breasts with pride. But when Thackeray published his *Paris Sketch Book*[1] in 1840, it was

[1] *The Sketch Book* is a medley of fiction, politics, and criticism, which had, with few exceptions, already seen the light in *The National Standard*, in *Fraser's Magazine*, and elsewhere. Most of the stories betray their origin. *A Caution to Travellers*, for instance, describes the sorrows of an Englishman, who falls among thieves in a Parisian gambling hell, and describes these sorrows

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happily rare. True, the fashion had been set in the decline of the eighteenth century by the nascent romanticism of Gray. True, two men of conspicuous talent had cast a curious eye upon France twenty years before the revolution. Sterne had crossed the Channel, that he might embroider his own sentimentality upon the fringe of what was then a foreign country; while Smollett had journeyed to Nice, that he might find health for himself, and might at his leisure record the habits and customs of his neighbours. After Sterne and Smollett came Arthur Young, that austere farmer who would have planted Chambord with turnips, whose thoughts were so easily diverted from the palaces of the great to drill-ploughs and harrows, and who, nevertheless, foresaw the coming reign of terror, which had been suspected by none save himself and Lord Chesterfield. But

in terms which have been familiar ever since the publication in 1777 of *La Quinzaine Angloise à Paris, ou l' Art de s'y ruiner en peu de tems.* To this "ouvrage posthume du docteur Stearne" Thackeray owes at least one scene in his story, unless we admit that such scenes have been the common property of fiction since the flood. In *Little Poinsinet*, again, Thackeray has drawn in extravagant colours a poor poet, who once enjoyed a certain celebrity, and who having fallen into abject poverty, drowned himself. Casanova came across him more than once in his pilgrimage through life, saved him from a watery grave in the Tiber, merely that a few years later the Guadalquivir might engulf him. In Casanova's phrase Poinsinet was "un tout petit jeune homme, laid, plein de feu, plaisant, et qui avait du talent pour le scène." Thackeray sets him in another light, which was doubtless traditional. As for Thackeray's Cartouche, he belongs less to history than to fancy and the chap-books. But he is a lively vagabond all the same.

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Thackeray did not need to go back to the eighteenth century for an example. Charles Dickens, his great contemporary, had already shown, in *Sketches by Boz*, what sympathy and imagination might discover in the familar haunts of one's own city. But, for all that, when Thackeray set out to paint for his countrymen the character and aspect of Paris, he was essaying, in the guise of a picturesque reporter, a kind of writing as yet unstaled by sanguine ignorance and the exigence of a daily paper.

From several points of view Thackeray seemed well equipped for the task. He was the master of an easy style, more familiar than correct, more boisterous than energetic. But such as it was, it fitted the picturesque reporter like a glove. High spirits were his constant companions, even when judgment deserted him for a while, and he carried his readers in and out the theatres, picture-galleries, and gardens of Paris with unfailing vivacity. Moreover, if his understanding was often befogged, he possessed an intricate knowledge of his subject; the French capital had been his second home; its life and literature had been familiar to him from his boyhood; he had lived there not merely as an opulent tourist, or as a light-hearted student in its schools of art, but as a poor stranger writing for a living. He had, therefore, every opportunity of expelling prejudice, and of combating that hasty generalisation which is the bane of the picturesque reporter.

Best of all, after Cambridge, he came to a Paris quick with "movements," alert with genius and

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gaiety. The victorious *Romantiques* were in full possession of the citadel; Hugo and Dumas were making an easy conquest of the playhouses, while Balzac was creating his country anew in the *Comédie Humaine*. Had he chosen, Thackeray might have read the works of Stendhal and Michelet, of Mérimée and George Sand, of Musset and Gautier, hot from the press. It was, too, the heyday of the *grisette*, when she and her long-haired companion danced and chatted and laughed with a zest and extravagance unknown to our chastened epoch. Fantasy and wit were in the air; a thousand Lucien de Rubemprés were entering Paris at every gate, and dreaming their dreams of poetry and triumph under the trees of the Luxembourg, or listening to the tempting voice of Lousteau and his kin beneath the shadows of its gracious palace. And the joy of life taught Thackeray to appreciate at least the one charm of France which cannot grow old. "I never landed at Calais pier," says he, "without feeling that a load of sorrow was left on the other side the water;" in brief, the sparkling air of France, the sense of holiday, the feeling of a vivid intelligence abroad, the consciousness that the people are gayer than ourselves, that, whether right or wrong, their thoughts are quicker and more whimsical—all this Thackeray suggests in spite of himself.

Even when the *fêtes* of July fill his austere soul with contempt, he owns that the sight is brilliant, happy, and beautiful. "If you want to see the French people to the greatest advantage," he writes, "you should go to a festival like this, where their

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manners and innocent gaiety show a very pleasing contrast to the coarse and vulgar hilarity which the same class exhibit in our own country at Epsom race-course, for instance, or Greenwich Fair." Again, he frankly acknowledges the delight which the French take in comely surroundings, in the beauty of restaurants, even in the proper adornment of a dirty, inodorous wine-shop. He is enthusiastic when he sees a crowd of mechanics, *endimanchés*, gazing with intelligent interest at the treasures of the Louvre; he freely owns that the French possess, what we do not, an abstract appreciation of art. Even when he parades his own sentimental method of criticism, he still reflects that Paris is a paradise of painters, and that the happy student who starves *au sixième* may wander all the day long in the resplendent palace of kings and emperors. So far his sympathy takes him; but an inborn Philistinism peeps out all the same, and he woefully misreads the character of our neighbours.

He expects in the French the same political intelligence which he finds in the English. He laughs furiously at the *fêtes* of July, because the revolution, which they celebrate, is in his eye a failure. He solemnly reproves the "Sancho-like gravity and naïveté" wherewith they applaud the achievements of Louis Philippe, whom he finds a contemptible monarch. But he forgets, in this heavy-handed reproof, that the Parisians are children of fancy, changeable and whimsical; children, too, who know the rules of logic, and who gladly proceed from false premisses to a logical, if a false, conclusion. For

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such vagaries as these he finds no censure too severe. The monarchy, says he, is a sham, liberty is a sham, the people is a political sham.

So he belabours monarch and people with a strange lack of humour and sympathy. Heine, his great contemporary, who was sitting in the same stalls, reading the same newspapers, witnessing the same festivals and processions, saw the truth with a far keener eye than did Thackeray. He knew that the French are comedians by nature, ready to take service under any manager, and to do their best for him whether he be Charles X or Louis Philippe. In their view "the play's the thing," and politics are but a single scene in the drama of life. *Panem et circenses* they love with a constant heart, and the circus is yet more to their mind than the bread. But Thackeray would demand of them political wisdom as well; he would ask them, when they were enjoying fireworks and the fresh air, if their enjoyment were justified by the political situation. And they would reply, properly enough, that a pageant needed no excuse, and that a summer holiday was its own justification.

Even *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*,[1] Thackeray's

[1] *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* was published in 1841. Thackeray, with Monckton Milnes for companion, witnessed the ceremony performed at the Invalides, and wrote his account post-haste. The work, in fact, was "compiled in four days, the ballad being added as an afterthought." The ballad—"The Chronicles of the Drum"—is the best of its kind that Thackeray ever wrote. The little book had a certain success. Writing to W. H. Thompson in 1841, Edward FitzGerald asked: "Have you read Thackeray's little book—the second Funeral of Napoleon? If

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liveliest essay in reporting, might have been touched with a lighter hand. True, nothing could have been more ridiculous than the behaviour of the Duc de Joinville, who, at the mere rumour of war with England, threw his comfortable furniture overboard, turned his yacht into a man-of-war, and exacted an oath from every man of his crew that he would die rather than give up the bones of the dead Emperor to the hated English. The hated English had entertained the Duc de Joinville with all the honours; they had intrusted the sacred coffin to his keeping, having previously carried it to the sea upon their own shoulders. But no sooner was his precious freight on board than the Duc de Joinville wished to play another part—the part of the soldier who would die but not surrender. Though an attack was out of the question, the hero would not be foiled of his applause, and seriously to reprove him for his folly is to misunderstand both the hero and his temperament. Convinced that England was greedy to reclaim what it had freely given up, the hero armed the hand which yesterday he had held out in friendship. Once more the Frenchman's premisses were false and his logic sound; and once more Thackeray considered the situation with excessive gravity.

He somewhere blames the English for not loving art for art's sake, and constantly incurs his own reproach. His artistic sympathy, in fact, was always

not, pray do; and buy it, and ask others to buy it: as each copy sold puts seven and one-half pence in T.'s pocket, which is very empty just now, I take it."

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imperfect, his point of view always utilitarian or philanthropic. His criticism of French literature, for instance, is less intelligent even than his criticism of French politics. He feels so little sympathy with the drama and romance of France that he never thinks of either apart from its subject and its moral effect. The drama of Victor Hugo and M. Dumas he finds "profoundly immoral and absurd"; he therefore prefers the drama of the common people, which "is absurd, if you will, but good and right-hearted." After he has seen "the most of the grand dramas which have been produced at Paris for the last half-dozen years," he declares that "a man may take leave to be heartily ashamed of the manner in which he has spent his time." By a still worse confusion of ideas he deems it wrong "to enjoy a cool supper at the Café Anglais" after the horrors of the play, and thus he implicates not only the actors but the audience in the crimes committed upon the pictured scene.

It is not remarkable, therefore, that he approaches the literature of the Romantic age without discrimination. As I have said, he might, if he would, have read the masterpieces of Balzac, Dumas, Hugo, Stendhal, and the rest hot from the press. Yet he mentions none of the masters save in dispraise. In the mellower age, which produced *The Roundabout Papers*, he had learned to love the great Alexander, but in the days of *The Paris Sketch Book* he shuddered that he could not read Balzac or Dumas "without the risk of lighting upon horrors." And whom did he

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admire? Why, Monsieur de Bernard, to be sure, "who is more remarkable than any other French author for writing like a gentleman: there is ease, grace, and *ton* in his style, which cannot be discovered in Balzac, or Soulié, or Dumas." So he prefers M. de Bernard's *Gerfaut*, and, still worse, M. Reybaud's ineffable *Jerôme Paturot*,[1] to the masterpieces of the *Comédie Humaine*, and at last you begin to think that he is laughing in his sleeve.

But he is not laughing at all: he is expressing the opinion of a gentlemanly Philistine, who esteems *ton* higher than truth, and who revolts against Balzac's candid insight. Indeed, any stick is good enough for Balzac's back, and if that eminent novelist had not put forth a long, dull, and pompous letter in Peytel's favour, a victim of judicial murder would assuredly have escaped the gallows. But time has fought, with all its weapons, against the critic. Nobody will ever read again MM. Reybaud and de Viel-Castel. But Honoré de Balzac is immortal, as Shakespeare is immortal, for he wrote the truth not only of France but of mankind.

Yet had Thackeray's point of view not been rigidly fixed, had he taken less note of literature and the drama, he might have composed a just picture of French life and thought. The permanence of some

[1] *Jerôme Paturot* inspires Thackeray with the following reflection: "As for De Balzac, he is not fit for the *salon*. In point of gentility, Dumas is about as genteel as a courier; and Frédérick Soulié as elegant as a *huissier*." "These are hard words," as the author says, and they are not ironical.

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of his criticisms is warrant of its truth. Well as he knew Paris, he confessed that only a partial knowledge was possible. "Intimacy there is none," said he; "we see but the outside of the people." And much of the outside was then, as now, hostility to England. Thackeray himself had no illusions. "Don't let us endeavour to disguise it—they hate us. Not all the protestations of friendship, not all the wisdom of Palmerston, not all the diplomacy of our distinguished plenipotentiary, Mr. Henry Lytton Bulwer, can make it, in our time at least, permanent and cordial." To-day, as in Thackeray's time, "men get a character for patriotism in France merely for hating England," and the hatred is so old that we need not trouble to explain it, nor to set it down to the criminality of this party or that. Indeed, when Thackeray discusses the ever-interesting problem of French and English, he is both wise and fair, even if he arrive at no conclusion. At what conclusion could he arrive? Our differences are emphasised by our propinquity, and perhaps France consults her own temper best in choosing alliances at a distance. Little as she knows of England, she knows less of Russia, and happily mistakes her ignorance for sympathy. But he who would understand France, must put out of his mind all thought of his own country, and this task Thackeray found impossible. He judged Paris rather by her divergencies from his standard than by qualities of her own, and even where his intelligence was sound, his sympathy was at fault. He had the humour to smile, but not the charity to condone.

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Yet *The Paris Sketch Book* was not written in vain. Its true result may be seen in his novels; and had he not sojourned in France, he could not have drawn the engaging de Florac, as true a Frenchman as ever was portrayed by English hand.

The Paris Sketch Book was the deliberate result of a long sojourn and many studies; its companion, *The Irish Sketch Book* (1843), was composed on a different plan. It is, in fact, a set of impressions gathered in a single voyage, and therefore differs not at all from what we should call to-day "special correspondence." In 1842, when he undertook the trip, Thackeray needed such relief as the rapidly shifting scenes of a journey might bring. The placid course of his life had been most rudely interrupted, and with a silent courage that was characteristic, he sought in Ireland both change and "copy." At first FitzGerald promised companionship, but his energy failed him, and Thackeray set out alone. "There's that poor fellow Thackeray gone off to Ireland," wrote FitzGerald; "and what a lazy beast I am for not going with him." But FitzGerald praised the book when it was published, and declared that it was "all true." And true no doubt it was, though it was a truth not acceptable to all Irishmen.

It gives to the reader a vivid impression of something seen and noted on the spot. The writer describes with equal zest the landscape and the people; nothing comes amiss to his eager mind, whether it be Irish politics or hot lobster. He is as keenly interested in the practical use of guano as in the curric-

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ulum of Templemoyle School. He sentimentalises, after his fashion, over the poverty of the Widow Fagan. "How much goodness and generosity—how much purity, fine feeling—nay, happiness"—says he in one of his favourite apostrophes, "may dwell among the poor whom we have just been looking at! Here, thank God, is an instance of this happy and cheerful poverty: and it is good to look, when we can, at the heart that beats under the threadbare coat, as well as the tattered old garment itself." Nowadays we take these qualities on trust; and rightly make no moral distinctions between rich and poor. But the exclamatory passage just quoted is eminently characteristic of its author, who unto the end of his career delighted somewhat naïvely in the obvious emotions.

On the other hand, the odd little chap-books, published in Dublin, which described after their own primitive manner the adventures of many an intrepid horse-thief, and the tragedy of many a hard-fought field, aroused his interest at once. Mr. James Freeny is an excuse for one of his most agreeable essays, and that reckless highwayman, no doubt, provided a hint at least for *Barry Lyndon*. He is presented in ironical style, without a word of excuse or reprobation, and he pleasantly interrupts the prevailing sentiment. Briefly, Thackeray, like many another traveller, found Ireland a bundle of contrasts: generosity and squalor, misery and lightheartedness, sport and rebellion, were to his vision inextricably mixed. He frankly avowed the difficulty of a conclusion. "To have an opinion

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about Ireland," says he, "one must begin by getting at the truth: and where is it to be had in the country? Or rather there are two truths, the Catholic truth and the Protestant truth. The two parties do not see things with the same eyes." None the less he was on the side of the Irish, though he never tired of ridiculing them, and he composed an attack upon the English government of Ireland by way of preface, which he was persuaded to suppress. Doubtless, had he lived to-day, he would have been a Home Ruler, as Sir Leslie Stephen says, but his opinion shifted with time and circumstance, and it would be idle to define it. *The Sketch Book*, however, was not the best result of his journey to Ireland; that must be sought in *Barry Lyndon*, and the admirable Irishmen, such as Captain Costigan, encountered in his novels. On the other hand, it had an immediate effect: it was the first book which gave Thackeray a definite place in the world of letters; it was dedicated to Lever; and it drew a word of congratulation from the great Dickens himself.

His next journey was farther afield, and might in those days (1844) have seemed almost adventurous. The offer of a passage on board a P. & O. boat persuaded him to realise an ancient project, and go to the East. Before starting he arranged to write a book of his travels for £200, he took with him the half-finished manuscript of *Barry Lyndon*, and let few weeks pass without sending something to *Punch*. But, despite these manifold interruptions, his real purpose was the composition of his *Notes of a Journey*

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from Cornhill to Cairo, which, when they were published in 1846, proved the best that their author had yet achieved. The book is admirably picturesque in style, and it contains passages of description which Thackeray never excelled. For all his love of painting, literature was in his blood, and if the *ateliers* of Paris had quickened his vision, the skill of putting what he saw into words was inborn. Yet here, too, are many traces of that sentimental Radicalism which its author never conquered. He looks upon Athens with a sternly practical eye, and, unmindful of its associations, merely notes that "its shabbiness beats Ireland, and that is a strong word." Not even Cobden himself surpassed that contemptuous summary, and it is characteristic of Thackeray's invincible optimism. In his eyes there was no time like the present, and a contemplation of Rhodes made him ask, "When shall we have a real account of these times and heroes—no good-natured pageant, like those of the Scott romances, but a real authentic story, to instruct and frighten honest people of the present day, and make them thankful that the grocer governs the world now in place of the baron?"

So he congratulates himself that he learned no Greek at school; so he swears he would prefer two hundred a-year in Fleet Street to the kingdom of the Greeks; so he echoes the common gag that Byron did not write from his heart. And then, the more profoundly to overwhelm you with regret, he will sketch you a sunny landscape, in which "every fig-tree is gilded and bright, as if it were an Hesperian

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orchard," or he will recall a boyish memory of *The Arabian Nights*, and he will do all this with so fine a spirit, that you wonder how the shadow of sentiment and reform ever fell across his buoyant, pleasure-loving nature. But he gives the explanation himself: Smyrna, says he, "rebuked all mutinous Cockneys into silence." A mutinous Cockney—that is what he was in one aspect, and his mutinous Cockneyism made him as blind to the elegant triviality of life as to Athens and its splendid memories.

But mutinous Cockney though he was on occasion, he possessed one gift, too rarely used, which should have corrected his error—the gift of irony. On his way to the East he finished with much tribulation his first complete essay in the art of fiction—*The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, a piece of ironic presentation, which has not since been surpassed. He had already tried his hand at irony and with ill-success, for *Catherine* is but irony touched by a sentimental regret; and though he never relinquished this method of satire, in his later novels it is so thick overlaid with pathos as to be hardly recognisable. But in *Barry Lyndon* the irony is sustained with a consistency rare in Thackeray, who found in *Jonathan Wild* the best model, and wrote in frank competition with his master.

Now, irony is neither popular nor easily understood. It is commonly supposed to be the easy trick of writing good when you mean bad. Johnson could find no better instance of it for his dictionary than "Bolingbroke was a holy man," and he showed for once that

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his hatred for a great statesman was stronger than his love of truth. The author of *The Courtier* was far more wisely inspired, and explains what he rightly calls "a handsome kind of raillery" with perfect lucidity and the happiest examples. "There is likewise a handsome kind of raillery," says he, "which consists in a certain dissimulation, when we speak one thing and mean another: I don't say the quite contrary, as if we were to call a dwarf giant or a negro white, or a very ugly a very beautiful person, because the contrariety is too manifest, but when in a grave and serious tone we express that to which inwardly we express no regard or assent."

The ingenious Castiglione guards his definition, which Johnson does not, and of course Castiglione is in the right of it. For irony is something far subtler than an interchange of opposites: it is a delicate masking of the truth, a method of presenting a fact with the greater force, because you set it upside down. But the figure has been so variously employed that it is wiser to give instances than to attempt a definition, and it will be seen that, by whomsoever affected, its essence is a hinted concealment of the truth. It is the ignorance of Œdipus the king, for instance, which touches the masterpiece of Sophocles with irony. The audience knows, as the king does not, that Œdipus' determination to discover the criminal who pollutes the State will recoil upon himself, and there is not a line of his utterance that is not double-edged. That is to say, the poet takes his public into a confidence from which his characters are excluded.

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The Socratic irony, on the other hand, is a lack of knowledge assumed by the omniscient, the more easily to entrap his opponents; and though it differs from the irony of Sophocles, it is true to the essential opposition of word and sense.

Yet the spirit as well as the word must be opposed to the sense if irony is to achieve its purpose. When Voltaire insists in the face of unparalleled disaster that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, he is preaching a sermon against the folly of optimism, and this he achieves not by a mere transposition of opposite words, but by changing the whole spirit of his romance. When Fielding set out to write *The History of Jonathan Wild the Great*—the masterpiece which profoundly influenced Thackeray—he neither sang a pæan to thievery, nor sought to demonstrate the sacredness of property. He merely drew the portrait of a "great" man, and let vice and virtue change places. After the same fashion, Thackeray let his hero, as arrant a scamp as ever cheated at cards or showed the white feather, tell his story in his own terms; and so fine a colour does Barry put upon the meanest of his actions, that while the reader detects his villainy in every line, he himself preserves a splendid unconsciousness. It is true, as we shall presently see, that the irony is false in many details, that the sentiment of every-day life is frequently and inappositely heard. But the blemishes of *Barry Lyndon* are not essential like the blemishes of *Catherine*, whose meaning is confused throughout by the intervention of the author's disapproval. The reader and

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the narrator—Barry in his own person—preserve each his own point of view, and the hero only speaks with the voice of commonplace conviction, when the author nods. Thus, for the most part, the terms of life's equation are changed, and the equation is solved in accordance with the rules of an imaginary algebra. In other words, Thackeray recognised that the language of irony is a language apart, in which thought, to be understood, must be freely and consistently translated; and though that kind of humour, which was the clear expression of his temperament, flashes intermittently in all his works, it burns nowhere else with so steady a flame as in *Barry Lyndon*.

Barry Lyndon was for the moment a palpable failure; it passed unnoticed through *Fraser's Magazine* in 1844, and its author never found it worth while to print it as a book. America, with a better judgment, pirated it in 1852, and it made a tardy appearance on our side the Atlantic in a posthumous edition. But the generation which delighted in the sentimental scandals of Harrison Ainsworth would have nothing to say to *Barry Lyndon*, a rascal drawn with spirit, and touched with a rarely failing irony. The meaning was not obvious; therefore the book was despised by the people. Why should we care about a criminal whom we would not ask to dinner? That is the criticism commonly deemed adequate for *Barry Lyndon*, and it is not worth while to insist upon its absurdity. The most primitive reader should see that here is no question of right or wrong; that an appeal is made not to the moral sense but to the intellect;

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and that he who condemns *Barry Lyndon* on a false ground, shows that he has misunderstood it. However, Thackeray was doubtless neither disturbed nor surprised at the reception of his work, for he, too, must have realised that irony is the boomerang of literature, which invariably returns home upon him who wields it.

In *Barry Lyndon*, then, Thackeray has sketched with incomparable spirit and agility the career of a braggart Irishman, a rascal who deserts from the army, who habitually cheats at cards, who blackmails men, and who bullies women. Of course it is part of the game that the hero should not recognise the semblance of a crime in his own chequered career, and a splendid satisfaction gives a zest to his lightest actions. His family (in his eyes) is "the noblest of the island, and perhaps of the universal world"; he would assume the Irish crown over his coat-of-arms, "but that there are so many silly pretenders to that distinction, and render it common." The pretenders, however, were not always a check upon his pride, and when after his marriage he set out to visit his estates in Devonshire, the Irish crown and the ancient coat of the Barrys were painted on the panels of his chariots "beside the Countess's coronet and the noble cognisance of the noble family of Lyndon." At the outset of his career Barry, like many another hero, met neither success nor appreciation. The stage upon which he was asked to play was far too small for his genius, and to do him justice, he soon left the humble cottage of his mother—Barryville it was

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called, with a proper magnificence—for the larger world of adventure and chicanery. So, in the proper spirit of the eighteenth century he is sent riding across Ireland, on whose highroad he encounters not only the celebrated one-eyed Captain Freeny, but the fair lady in distress, the false companion of every true knight.

Forced to enlist by fear of an iniquitous law, he changes clothes with a milksop officer, and proudly deserts his colours; but once again—the last time for many years—good fortune deserts him, and he is kidnapped by a beggarly German and forced to become a private in Bülow's regiment. To this epoch in his life he always looked back with pardonable displeasure. Like a true aristocrat, he "never had a taste for anything but genteel company, and hated all descriptions of low life." How, then, could he tolerate the squalor and discomfort which necessarily disgraced the kidnapped private in a regiment of ruffians? Of course he made the best of a miserable position. He kept inviolate that pride of birth which never deserted him, and he did not soil his hands with vulgar toil. When the stress of war was relaxed, "many of our men," says he, "got leave to work in trades; but I had been brought up to none: and besides, my honour forbade me." But, at least, he could serve Captain van Potzdorff as confidential servant without putting a blot upon the scutcheon of the Irish kings; and when once he was promoted to be a spy, his self-respect was assured. At this time he was animated by a kind of optimism, which was

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hardly worthy so great a man. "My maxim is to bear all," he wrote, "to put up with water if you cannot get burgundy, and if you have no velvet to be content with frieze. But burgundy and velvet are the best, *bien entendu*, and the man is a fool if he will not secure the best when the scramble is open." The real Barry speaks in the last sentence; the shallow optimism which would put up with water in any case was the mere boast of youth.

Set by a lucky accident to spy upon his gifted uncle, le Chevalier de Balibari, the hero at last found the career best suited to his genius. Henceforth the faro table supplied his extravagant wants; henceforth uncle and nephew took that place in the world for which their skill and their graces eminently fitted them. Nor could they have found a better arena for their deeds of daring than the Duchy of X., for the Duchy was not a Tom Tiddler's ground where any fool could pick up gold. Gold there was to be had; but skill and resolution were necessary to its acquisition. "None but men of courage and genius," says Barry with pardonable pride, "could live and prosper in a society where every one was bold and clever; and here my uncle and I held our own—ay, and more than our own." The luck of the tables may change for a night, but persistence is the secret of success; and the two Irishmen won not only wealth but influence as well, by the subtle acceptance of promissory notes.

Meanwhile the ingenious Barry was busy with another project. "I had determined," he says, "as

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is proper with gentlemen (it is only your low people who marry for mere affection), to consolidate my fortunes by marriage." And perhaps his uncle's brain never conceived a bolder scheme than Barry's marriage with the Countess Ida. That it came to naught, and was followed by the tragic murder of a princess, was not their fault.[1] They knew not the spies that were arrayed against them; they did not fathom the villainy of the police-minister, nor the ultimate cowardice of Magny, the victim through whose embarrassment their triumph was to come. But fail they did, and failure drove them once more to be wanderers upon the face of Europe, wanderers with a sound knowledge of life and a devout worship of the goddess Opportunity.

The second adventure of "the Tipperary Alcibiades," as Sir Charles Lyndon[2] insolently called the ingenious Barry, was more successful. On the death of that baronet, Barry forced the wealthiest widow in the three kingdoms to marry him, and thus attained the climax of his life. The rest of the narrative is but a record of decay: how he squandered the lady's fortune, how he lost his son, the young Viscount of Castle Lyndon, how, sunk in debt, he was put away

[1] Thackeray, as Mrs. Ritchie tells us, took the episode of Duke Victor and his Duchess from a book entitled *L'Empire, ou dix ans sous Napoléon*, par un Chambellan: Paris, 1836. In this book the story is told of the first king of Wurtemberg, who killed his wife for adultery.

[2] Sir Charles Lyndon is drawn after Charles Hanbury Williams, a great wit in a witty age, a diplomatist and man of the world, whose fate was hapless as Lyndon's own.

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into the Fleet Prison, where his aged mother soothed his declining years—all this is the natural Nemesis of superb fortune. But while he was at his best he challenges Jonathan Wild himself, and his theory of greatness would not have shamed the great thief-catcher himself.

Aided, no doubt, by the wit and intelligence of his uncle, he formulated his views in what may be termed a philosophy of conduct. He saw very early in his journey through the world that no man can be great who is not boastful. "I own," said he, "that I am disposed to brag of my birth and other acquirements; for I have always found that if a man does not give himself a good word his friends will not do it for him," and truly Barry Lyndon never conceals his worth under a cloak of modesty. Without ceasing he praises his courage, his beauty, his strength, his equal skill with cards or sword, and the splendour of his equipages. When he is in good luck, his story is a pæan of praise to his own prowess. And if we may believe him, the fair sex outdid the hero himself in admiration. It was his agreeable way to make love to all women, "of whatever age or degree of beauty," and who was there in Europe to resist his fascination? "I need not mention my successes among the fairer portion of the creation," said he, in a passage which his creator has freely adapted from the *Mémoires* of Casanova. "One of the most accomplished, the tallest, the most athletic, and the handsomest gentleman of Europe as I was then, a young fellow of my figure could not fail of having advantages, which a person

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of my spirit knew very well how to use. But upon these subjects I am dumb. Charming Schuvaloff, black-eyed Sczotarska, dark Valdez, tender Hegenheim, brilliant Langeac!—ye gentle hearts that knew how to beat in old times for the warm young Irish gentleman, where are ye now? . . . Oh! to see the Valdez once more, as on that day I met her first driving in state with her eight mules and her retinue of gentlemen by the side of yellow Mançanares! Oh, for another drive with Hegenheim in the gilded sledge over the Saxon snow! False as Schuvaloff was, 'twas better to be jilted by her than to be adored by any other woman. I can't think of any one of them without tenderness. I have ringlets of all their hair in my poor little museum of recollections."

So he treated them with the savagery that became a man while he was with them, and when they were vanished, he treasured the trinkets of their love with a sensibility that the Chevalier de Seingalt himself, the Irishman's great exemplar, might have envied. But love after all was an interlude (or a series of interludes) in a *chevaleresque*, industrious career. The real business of Barry's life, as of Casanova's, was gambling, and he was far too noble to cast a slur on the brilliant pursuit to which he owed his greatness. In truth, his rhapsody on gaming does equal honour to his head and his heart. He was not the man to make excuses, or to cry pardon where no pardon was sought. When he composed his celebrated defence of play he was speaking of the good old times before "the cowardice of the French aristocracy," to use his own ex-

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pression, "brought ruin and discredit upon our order." With a justified indignation he declares that "they cry fie now upon men engaged in play; but I should like to know how much more honourable *their* modes of livelihood are than ours. The broker of the Exchange, who bulls and bears, and buys and sells, and dabbles with lying loans, and trades on State secrets, what is he but a gamester? The merchant who deals in teas and tallow, is he any better? His bales of dirty indigo are his dice, his cards come up every year instead of every ten minutes, and the see is his green table. . . . I say that play was an institution of chivalry: it has been wrecked along with other privileges of men of birth. When Seingalt engaged a man for six-and-thirty hours[1] without leaving the table, do you think he showed no courage? . . . When, at Toeplitz, the Duke of Courland brought fourteen lacqueys, each with four bags of florins, and challenged our bank to play against the sealed bags, what did we ask? 'Sir,' said we, 'we have but eighty thousand florins in the bank, or two hundred thousand at three months. If your Highness's bags do not contain more than eighty thousand, we will meet you.' And we did, and after eleven hours' play, in which our bank was at one time reduced to two hundred and three ducats, we won seventeen thousand florins of him. Is *this* not something like boldness? does *this* profession not require skill, and perseverance, and bravery? Four crowned heads looked on at the

[1] Casanova de Seingalt played for forty-two hours without a break, if one may believe his own story.

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game, and an Imperial princess, when I turned up the ace of hearts and made Paroli, burst into tears. No man on the European continent held a higher position than Redmond Barry then, and when the Duke of Courland lost he was pleased to say that we had won nobly; and so we had, and spent nobly what we won."

Nor must it be supposed that Barry advocated the employment of foul means. He had a theoretic contempt for all common practices. "It is only the clumsy fool who *cheats*," he said—"who resorts to the vulgar expedients of cogged dice and cut cards. Play grandly, honourably," this was his exhortation. "Be not cast down at losing; but, above all, be not eager at winning, as mean souls are." Such was Barry Lyndon's philosophy, and what gamester ever formulated a better one? So good is it, that it is Casanova's own; and when Barry, a confirmed cheat, condemns cheating, he is but anticipating that hero's famous method of "correcting" fortune. But great as Barry was, his uncle, the Chevalier, had elements of grandeur which the nephew could not comprehend. In style and intellect he was incomparably the superior. He, in fact, was the gamester doubled by the diplomatist—be-starred and be-ribboned as only the servants of courts are be-ribboned and be-starred. Even in gaming mere profit was not his sole end, and he never forgot that true grandeur lies also in method. This the nephew, eager for wealth, could not wholly appreciate. "My uncle," said he, "(I speak with great respect of him) was too much of a devotee, and too

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much of a martinet at play, ever to win *greatly*;" and forthwith he chid him for lack of daring, but he does not see that his uncle's dignity and worldly wisdom were worth more to them than many a stolen coup. So the Chevalier finished his career as he began it, torn between beauty and the Church. Now a monastery claims him, now he succumbs to the fascinations of a ballet-dancer. But in all things he is discreet and a gentleman, nor could Thackeray have devised a more suitable refuge for his declining years than the Irish College, which lies apart under the shadow of the Pantheon, and which fitted his demure dignity as justly as Barry's roystering spirit was punished by the Fleet.

In *Barry Lyndon* Thackeray found a task which suited his talent; and being happy in his task, he performed it with a spirit and success which he did not often surpass. For *Barry* is his best experiment in irony, sustained for the most part with a proper sense of his model and his intention. But it would not have been written by Thackeray, if it had not lapsed now and again from its lofty ideal. The author cannot completely exclude himself and his opinions from the drama. The sentimentalist, whom we know so well, is often looking over the shoulder of the ironist, and interrupting the conduct of the story with comment or apology. When Barry drops a tear of sympathy over the misery of his mother, we know that he merely echoes the author of his being. Such a son as Barry showed himself would be indifferent whether his mother starved or not; and when he tells you that

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"many a time the poor soul left him to go and break her heart in her own room alone," he alienates your sympathy without winning your belief. That is a specimen of false pathos. On the other hand, the emotion which he betrays on meeting his uncle for the first time is natural and sincere. The old ruffian, with his apricot-coloured velvet and his noble manners, appeared irresistible. As Barry declared, "he burst into tears"—why he knew not; yet the tears are easily explained: he had met one of his own kin splendidly apparelled, and he knew that his fortune was made. But at other times we find this notable swashbuckler babbling of flowers, or recalling his infancy with a sigh, and we can only regard those backslidings into sensibility as a serious blemish.

The blemish is the more surprising, because Thackeray derived his portrait of Barry from the best sources, and painted it after the best model. As I have said, from beginning to end he kept his eye upon *Jonathan Wild*, and he could not have found a better inspiration; while the eighteenth century, that golden age of beaus and bucks, supplied him with abundant material. The true original of Barry was, no doubt, Andrew Robinson Stoney, bully and fortune-hunter, and my Lady Lyndon is a very fair presentment of the Countess of Strathmore, the daughter and heiress of George Bowes. Stoney, of course, had a more brilliant career than the hero of Thackeray's romance, for not only did he marry and ill-treat Miss Newton, a fortune of £30,000; but after her death he brought off the grand coup, and captured the wealthiest blue-stocking of her

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time. The Countess, again, outshone, if she resembled, Lady Lyndon: she, too, dipped her finger in the ink-pot, she wrote *Confessions*,[1] she patronised men of learning and talent, and during her widowhood her house was "fairly denominated a Temple of Folly." She, too, had watched the death of one husband without breaking her heart, and met more than her match at a second venture. As for Stoney, who, after marriage, assumed the name of Bowes, he lacked (says his biographer) both moral principle and physical courage, and Barry hung not an inch behind him. A chap-book describes the marriage in terms which fit Barry and his spouse to a hair. "Here then were joined in holy wedlock," to quote the popular account, "two such as for the honour of nature are seldom to be seen. The one had broken the heart of a former wife, the other had not lengthened the days of a former husband; in a battle royal of a main of cocks, the two surviving ones contend for existence, and thus are these two pitted as if by positive destruction."

Even in the smallest details the similarity of truth and fiction is evident: the young Lord Glamis, for instance, like Viscount Bullingdon, fled from his brutal stepfather, and came back after many years to claim his inheritance. But while Stoney Bowes sat for the portrait, there are others who suggested a

[1] *The Confessions of the Countess of Strathmore* (1793), wrung from her by her brutal husband, are a document which it would be difficult to match in the records of the world. They prove conclusively that Stoney surpassed Barry himself in cowardice and cynicism.

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touch here or there. It has been said that Casanova was for something in the picture, and though it is certain that Thackeray borrowed much from the incomparable *Mémoires*, especially from the scenes at the green table, little of the Chevalier de Seingalt's true character is revealed in the vulgar braggart that was Barry Lyndon. For Casanova, despite his faults, was a man of intelligence and knowledge. The Prince de Ligne, who wrote with authority, gave him credit for delicacy and honour; he was so deeply tinctured with learning that he bored his friends with quotations from Homer and Horace; he was always grateful, unless his pride were hurt; and his character, complex and disconcerting, remains a puzzle of biography. In any case, he is plainly remote from Barry Lyndon, whom he could have met nowhere else than over the cards.

Tiger Roche,[1] on the other hand, gave Thackeray many a useful hint, and not even Barry could outdo this Irishman in blackguardly conduct. For not only had the Tiger, an artist in profitable matrimony, robbed several unsuspecting ladies of their fortunes; he had bullied and beaten men all the world over. He won his name in America, where, being charged with robbery by an officer who declined to meet him, he sprang at him like a "tiger," and "tore away a mouthful of flesh," which he declared was "the sweetest morsel he had ever tasted." But he most

[1] An account of Tiger Roche is printed in *Ireland Sixty Years Since*, and he is the hero of several chap-books which Thackeray may have picked up during his journey in Ireland.

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closely resembles Barry Lyndon in his sudden alternations of courage and cowardice. At one moment brave as a tiger, at another he skulked like a whipped cur; and Thackeray has used one passage in his life to excellent purpose. It will be remembered that when Barry Lyndon lay in the Fleet Prison, his pluck deserted him. A small man was "always jeering him, and making game of him," and when he asked him to fight, Barry hadn't the courage. This episode is frankly borrowed from the life of Tiger Roche, whose spirit so pitifully broke down in the Fleet that he submitted to any insult. "On one occasion," says his biographer, "he had a trifling dispute with a fellow-prisoner, who kicked him, and struck him a blow in the face. There was a time when his fiery spirit would not have been satisfied but with the blood of the offender. He now only turned aside and cried like a child. It happened that his countryman, Buck English, seizing a stick, flogged him in a savage manner: Roche made no attempt to retaliate or resist, but crouched under the punishment." Yet no sooner was he out of prison than his spirit and bravery returned; he cheerfully faced the point of the stoutest antagonist; and then once more he showed the white feather, and pitifully quailed before the insult of a bully. In picturesqueness Roche has the advantage, but it is plain to see what he contributed to the making of Barry Lyndon, who, however, is none the worse as a portrait because more than one ruffian sat for it.

In the early 'Forties sentiment was stronger than

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intelligence. The story, which should have made Thackeray famous, passed unnoticed through a magazine. Not even the admirable episode of the German Duchy, sketched with a technical mastery and a knowledge of life which Thackeray seldom surpassed, availed to find him readers. But meantime journalism was giving him the reputation that literature could not give, and, like many another man of letters, he was being loudly acclaimed for work unworthy his talent.

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CHAPTER IV

PUNCH AND *VANITY FAIR*

WRITING to Frederick Tennyson in 1842, Edward FitzGerald, a Cassandra of criticism, said: "Tell Thackeray not to go to *Punch* yet." Artistically the advice was sound. A comic paper, were it possible, would be like a dinner of sauces, such as an accomplished cook would not consent to prepare. No man can be funny either to order or at all times, and wit is so precious a gift that it should flash upon us unexpectedly. *Punch*, moreover, was already pontifical, though but a year old. It had already taken its place among British institutions, and despite its profession of wit and humour, it was (and is) portentously serious. The mahogany-tree became sacred as soon as it was carved, and it is not surprising to any one who turns over its pages that its jubilee was celebrated by a religious service. But to Thackeray it was not so much a field for artistic expression as a means of livelihood. For some ten years he served it loyally, and contributed to its columns a vast deal of workmanlike journalism. There the matter might have ended; a few memorable pages might have been rescued from oblivion, and the rest buried, as journalism should always be buried, in the columns where first it saw the light.

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But the demon of curiosity pursued Thackeray from *Fraser's* to *Punch*, so that it is our own fault if we do not know every line and scratch which he sent to our only comic paper. The archæologist has devoted infinite research to the discovery of the unimportant. He has told us how many "cartoons" were the fruit of Thackeray's suggestion, how many "social cuts" Thackeray's ingenuity designed. He has traced, with indisputable authority, the hand of Thackeray through many a weary volume. He tells us how often his victim calls himself "Muff," how often he prefers to be known as "Spec." Not a paragraph escapes him, and while his energy is laudable, it is less than fair to the novelist's memory. A writer is not at his best in a note written with the printer's devil at the door, and his personal view is very soon merged in the general policy of a journal.

It is not, therefore, in his casual contributions to *Punch* that we may hope to surprise the real Thackeray. We may marvel at the versatility of interest which enabled him to turn from France to Ireland, from foolscap to the drawing-block. But if he alone wielded both pen and pencil, his colleagues rivalled him in the variety of subjects which they were ready to treat at a moment's notice. In politics he reveals himself a thorough-paced Liberal, a Home Ruler, at first from conviction, and presently because he "loved a quiet life," an admirer of Cobden, and, as became the author of *The Book of Snobs*, a contemner of courts and their parasites. Most of the windmills at which he tilted long since lost their sails. To-day nobody

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cares about Jenkins, under which name Thackeray guyed Foster of *The Morning Post*, or the Poet Bunn, or James Silk Buckingham. And after these the common objects of his scorn were Prince Albert and his hat, Joinville and the French; but when they were ridiculed by others he felt a resentment, which was partly justified, for, however strongly he felt, his hand was never so heavy as Douglas Jerrold's.

The most of his contributions to *Punch*, then, are the merest journey-work. *The Legend of Jawbrahim Heraudee*, wherewith he made his *début* in 1842, is no better than *Miss Tickletoby's Lectures upon English History*, a desperate attempt to be funny, which was discouraged by the editor. The Fat Contributor is just as little to one's mind, and it was not until Thackeray resuscitated his old friend Jeames that he did himself justice. The hunt for railway shares gave the incomparable de la Pluche an admirable chance to express his views upon finance and society; but it was with *The Book of Snobs* that Thackeray first found a new talent and hit the public taste. The time of its appearance was propitious. In 1846 the wave of revolution which broke over Europe two years later was already gathering force and volume. Democracy, if not fashionable, was popular. There were thousands of Britons eager to see the follies and vulgarities of the great world exposed; and they took the same delight in *The Book of Snobs* as our democrats of to-day take in the gossip of "society" papers. Old as the vice is now, it was not new in 1846; but Thackeray stamped it with an official

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name, which, like the quality it denotes, is imperishable.[1]

The origin of the word is lost in obscurity. It was not Thackeray's own invention; indeed it is not uncommonly found in the works of Dickens, Lever, and others; nor was it always used in its familiar sense. In the Cambridge of the early nineteenth century it was a contemptuous term put upon the townsmen by the members of the university; and since it makes its first appearance in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* of 1824,[2] being absent from the earlier edition (1803), its introduction may be approximately fixed. Thackeray, the undergraduate, knew the name well, since it was borne by the little journal for which he wrote at Cambridge; but there is all the difference in the world between a "townsman" as opposed to a

[1] Snobbishness is doubtless as old as the world, and you may track it in any period you will. In 1802, says *The Times*, "a scandalous intrusion was practised by persons employed by some of the morning papers, to take down the names of persons of fashion as they got out of their carriages to visit their friends." One of these gentry, surprised in the servants' hall of the *Dilettante* Theatre, in Tottenham Street, was, we are told, "sent to the watch-house." To-day he would be far more kindly treated, and he (or she) would assuredly drive to the theatre in a brougham. But so far has snobbishness been carried in our day, that the press shows a naïve surprise if august personages can speak or walk. Not long since it was gravely asserted that a certain princess, having made a small purchase in a shop, defrayed the cost out of her own purse. Out of whose purse, save her own, should she have defrayed it?

[2] "SNOB. A term applied indiscriminately to all who have not the honour of being members of the University."

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"gownsman" and the superfine gentry of *The Book of Snobs*. Probably the general sense, which still survives, is also the older, the narrowed use of the word at Cambridge being a mere piece of local exclusiveness. At any rate, De Quincey employs the word to the same purpose as Thackeray in 1822,[1] which proves that it belonged not to a university, but to the world. But certainty is impossible, nor does Thackeray help us to pierce the mystery. "Not above five-and-twenty years since," he writes, "a name, an expressive monosyllable, arose to designate the race." Maybe he is thinking of De Quincey, maybe of his own undergraduate journal. The effect in either case is the same: he leaves us with a word which the philologists cannot explain, and which the hardiest lexicographer would hesitate to define.[2]

So much for the word; now for the quality. "We cannot say what it is," wrote Thackeray, "any more than we can define wit, or humour, or humbug; but we *know* what it is." Nevertheless he attempted a definition himself, which does not enlighten us. "*He who meanly admires mean things is a snob*—perhaps that is a safe definition of the character." If it

[1] See *The Opium-Eater* (edition 1862, p. 120): "Those base snobs who would put up with a vile Brummagem substitute." For this quotation I am indebted to the courtesy of Dr. J. A. H. Murray.

[2] The last step in the word's development is the strangest of all. The French took hold of it, and not knowing its meaning, bent it to their will, so that in the Paris of to-day it means the top of the fashion, and the word has acquired a sense precisely opposite to that which it connoted in the *Gradus ad Cantabrigiam* of 1824.

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were, then *The Book of Snobs* need not have been written, for a single page would be sufficient to convince the most hardened sinner. Nor does Thackeray live up to his definition through a single page. The things which the most of his snobs admire are not mean, unless rank, intelligence, and achievement are all mean. But the truth is, Thackeray had "an eye for a snob"; he tracked Snobs through history, "as certain little dogs in Hampshire hunt out truffles." Wherever there was a man, he saw a snob; if the man were of high rank, he overvalued himself; if he were of low rank, he overvalued others. Lady Bareacres is a snob, because she spends more than she can afford; Lady Scraper is a snob, because she prefers a mutton-chop eaten in splendour to a whole saddle consumed in Brixton; Sir Walter Raleigh was a snob, because, being a loyal courtier, he spread his cloak before the feet of his sovereign.

But from beginning to end Thackeray's bias is evident. He inclines so far to the side of the people that he blames the kings of this world for the adulation heaped upon them by fools. If sovereignty be anything better than a disgrace, then Louis XIV was a great king, since no man ever so well understood the pageantry of a throne. Yet to Thackeray "old squaretoes" was a snob, who depended wholly upon his wig. He considers the army with the same prejudiced eye, and writes like a war-correspondent lately returned from the front: the red-jackets are "great-whiskered warriors, who have faced all dangers of climate and battle"; the officers who perform "the

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idiotic services" of command are "vacuous, good-natured, gentlemanlike, rickety little lieutenants." Rag and Famish, again, are in no sense snobs; cads they may be; but to include such raffs as these and Lord Byron in one category, is to confuse not merely words but qualities.

At the university he is no more happy than in the army. He is indignant because in his day noblemen were granted degrees upon easy terms. But here was no snobbishness; it was merely part of an ancient system, which could be attacked, and has been abolished, on its merits. The sizar at Cambridge, the servitor at Oxford, suffered an evident hardship; yet let it be remembered that philanthropy, not snobbishness, was the first cause of their position, and that similar hardships will be inevitable until we are all equally rich, or equally poor, by Act of Parliament. And then, as if to show the insecurity of his argument, he condemns Crump, the Master of Saint Boniface, for whom, no doubt, we may read Whewell, because "he being a beggar, has managed to get upon horseback." Would he have kept him, we wonder, at an eternal charity school, or would he have forced him to carry to the Master's Lodge an air of affected humility? It is, indeed, a touch of true snobbishness to twit the successful scholar with his humble origin, and Thackeray's argument is marred by a manifest contradiction. He who attempts to rise is a snob; he who deigns to descend is a snob; and if equality is our only salvation, it is by the author's reasoning plainly unattainable.

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With much of Thackeray's satire it is easy to sympathise. All honest men hate tuft-hunting as they hate an assumption of gentility. We none of us can find words strong enough to condemn the "Court Circular," which, while it treats the exalted in rank as superhuman, invites the lower middle class to spatter their familiar conversation with great names. But Thackeray does not stay his hand at legitimate denunciation. He worries his point, until he himself becomes the mouthpiece of mean thoughts. He seems to be haunted by a species of self-consciousness; he is surprised that he is where he is; he knows that somebody is above or below him; but he cannot take his place in the world (or anybody else's place) for granted. He quite rightly holds a society "which sets up to be polite, and ignores Arts and Letters, to be a snobbish Society." But Arts and Letters have always got the recognition they desire from a Society which, by Thackeray's own argument, has no right to encourage them.

In truth, there is a touch of wounded pride in every page of this *Book of Snobs*, which Thackeray should never have betrayed. At the very time at which he was scarifying the Snob, he was dining where he could, and moving with a proper pleasure "in the inner circle." A year later he takes a genuine and justified delight in riding with dukes and duchesses at Spa. Like all other men, he preferred good company to bad, and who would blame him? Yet he cannot view the situation with a simple eye. When the young Disraeli fluttered into the highest

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society he professed a frank joy in his success. When he dined at a distinguished peer's, "the only commoner in the room," he was conscious of a triumph, and a man of sense must surely confess Disraeli's attitude at once more honest and more dignified. How, then, shall we harmonise Thackeray's practice and theory? It would be hard, indeed, had not Sir Leslie Stephen given us the key. "Thackeray was at this time," says Sir Leslie, "an inhabitant of Bohemia, and enjoyed the humours and unconventional ways of the region. But he was a native of his own Tyburnia, forced into Bohemia by distress, and there meeting many men of the Bludyer type who were his inferiors in refinement and cultivation." Truly, there is no easier method of falsifying facts than to live with one's inferiors. No doubt Thackeray seemed a snob to the Bohemians of his acquaintance, who resented his superiority with a jealous rage; no doubt, also, it was in Bohemia that he saw the folly of pretence, and learned to exaggerate in his mind's eye the outward shows of life.

But it was not merely his environment which confused his vision. *The Snob Papers* betray a lack of humour, an inability to look at things in their right proportion, which it is not easy to condone. Thackeray was persuaded that all things are barbarous which are not of practical utility. He agreed with Cobden, he said, that Courts are barbarous, that "beef-eaters are barbarous." He hated tradition, and denounced in set terms "the brutal, unchristian, blundering Feudal system." But to denounce is not to abolish.

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As we are born of the past, so we cannot, by a mere act of will, rid ourselves of our ancestry and its influence. The Feudal system may be all that a hostile fancy paints it, but it shaped the world we live in, the only world we shall ever live in. Nor would Thackeray's argument be sound, unless he re-created the human race, and let it fight out its battles *in vacuo*.

But there is another reason why Thackeray was prone to detect his favourite vices in everybody,—he was strangely interested in the trivialities of life. The philosopher who could not endure the "bounce" of Dumas nor the brutality of M. de Balzac, liked to reflect that Major Ponto's hollands was gin, that Sackville Maine was ruined at the "Sarcophagus," that Timmins' dinner was not yet paid for. True, these lesser evils are part of the tragedy of life, but they are not all its tragedy; and it is Thackeray's weakness sometimes to have mistaken the part for the whole. Once taken hold of by this dominant idea, he could not shake off the obsession; he continued until the end believing that every man he met was a snob, and forgot that if snobbishness be the common factor of humanity, it would be as well to strike it out and make an end of it.

But if *The Book of Snobs* is based upon a confusion of thought, it none the less has conspicuous merits. The style, though now and again forced to a witticism, is often as lucid and supple as Thackeray's best; the sketches of character scattered up and down the book are admirably fresh and truthful, nor does the fact that he afterwards drew them on a larger scale

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impair their interest and veracity. As I have said, Thackeray made no scruple of repeating himself, and *The Book of Snobs*, no less than *The Sketch Books*, contains the raw material of much fiction. Cinqbars and Glenlivat, my lady Carabas and the Honourable Sir George Tufto, were already alive in the pages of *Punch*, and the years did no more than add to their natural growth. But *The Book of Snobs* touched the popular fancy, and made Thackeray famous. It achieved more than this: it profoundly influenced its author. Thackeray once told Motley that "the *Snob Papers* were those of his writings he liked the least," and we can easily believe it. None the less he never shook himself free from its bondage. Henceforth he was, more often than not, a chronicler of snobs, and it was only when his imagination carried him back to the eighteenth century that he forgot the twisted standard of life he had himself set up. It is not uncommon, this spectacle of an author enslaved by his own book; but the slavery dimmed Thackeray's outlook upon the world, and it is impossible to observe without regret the complacency wherewith he answered the too urgent demand of the people.

To enumerate the miscellaneous prose and verse which Thackeray sent to *Punch* in some ten years were a thankless task. Wherever he went, to Brighton or to the East, he found time for a column of jocular correspondence. But there are one or two works which have deservedly been saved from the wreckage of journalism. *The Novels by Eminent Hands* are the best, as they were the first, of their

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kind — witty, pertinent, and good-natured. *The Travels in London* and *Mr. Brown's Letters to his Nephew* echo in every line the shrewd, middle-aged man of the world, in whose pompous garb their author liked to masquerade. So he wrote much and easily, and found time for the visits to Paris, which were his best-loved pleasures. "He is in full play and pay in London," wrote FitzGerald, "writing in a dozen reviews, and a score of newspapers: and while health lasts he sails before the wind." And his success was due in great measure to *Punch*. *Punch*, in other words, cut the string of his balloon, which presently sped across the sky amid trailing clouds of glory. One visible renown was a silver statuette of the humpback presented him in 1848 by Dr. John Brown and other admirers in Edinburgh. Moreover, he could at last be easily placed. "Thackeray? Yes. The man on *Punch*;" and once a man is "placed," fame is never long in reaching him.

Nevertheless, he felt the strain of journalism, as all must feel it. No sooner did he sit down to his novel, whichever it might be, than a promised article diverted him, and the terms on which he lived with some of his colleagues did not lessen the strain. So that his resignation, in 1853, was neither unexpected nor inexplicable. He wrote to his mother that "it was a general scorn and sadness which made him give up *Punch*," and no doubt it was fatigue as well as a difference of policy which induced his resignation. In 1849 he told Mrs. Brookfield that he "was getting so weary of *Punch* that he thought he must

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have done with it." Four years later he had done with it. "What do you think I have done to-day?" he wrote to the same friend; "I have sent in my resignation to *Punch*. There appears in next *Punch* an article so wicked, I think, by poor ——, that upon my word I don't think I ought to pull any longer in the same boat with such a savage little Robespierre. The appearance of this incendiary article put me in such a rage that I could only cool myself with a ride in the park."

The article was an attack upon Louis Napoleon, which Thackeray believed to be "dangerous for the welfare and peace of the country." Nor was the epilogue to his collaboration more agreeable than the reason of his departure. *Punch*, like all those who reserve to themselves the right of flaying others by adverse criticism, has always been exquisitely sensitive to the faintest reproach. A year after he had resigned, Thackeray, in an article upon Leech contributed to *The Quarterly*, wrote "half a line regarding his old *Punch* companions," to quote a letter addressed to Mr. Evans,[1] "which was perfectly true, which I have often said, but which I ought not to have written." The half-line is wholly void of offence, yet *Punch* resented it with all the fury of a delicate critic. "Fancy a number of *Punch*," wrote Thackeray, "without Leech's pictures! What would you give for it? The learned gentlemen who write the work must feel that without, it were as well

[1] The letter is printed at length in Mr. Spielmann's *History of Punch*.

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left alone. Surely there is nothing for offence in so moderate a statement, in which, moreover, Thackeray included himself. But the offence was given, and it could only be purged by a dinner of reconciliation. However, Thackeray had loyally served the journal which, in its time, had been of excellent service to him, and had found an appreciative audience for the novels which had been appearing month after month during the past six years.

On January 1, 1847, there was published in a yellow wrapper, now famous, the first number of *Vanity Fair*. Until the fifth number, we are told, the story aroused little interest, and the publishers, in the prudence of their souls, were half persuaded to suppress it. Then suddenly a trivial circumstance—the appearance, 'tis said, of *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*—aroused the popular curiosity, and all the world was chattering of *Vanity Fair*. Thus it is that books are commonly found good or bad by accident, and owe what is called "success" to any other element than their own merit. But *Vanity Fair* was doubly fortunate: deliberate criticism echoed the people's voice, and before the story was half finished it had been reviewed—with outspoken appreciation—by Abraham Hayward in *The Edinburgh*. To-day the heavy artillery of the quarterlies can neither kill a foe nor save a friend; but fifty years ago opinions were not framed and broken in a night, and, incredible though it seem, an article by Hayward helped to decide the fate of the book.

Thackeray, then, was happy in the reception of *Vanity Fair*, and the passing years have confirmed the

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instant verdict. Indeed, stubborn as is the mind of man, it would have been surprising if the book had not touched the taste of the town. For it was fresh both in matter and manner. It owed nothing to contemporaneous foppery; it was as remote from Bulwer as from Ainsworth. As in his shorter stories, so in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray forgot the rivals who environed him, and went back for inspiration to the true English novel of Fielding. He called the book "a novel without a hero"; he might have called it a novel without a plan. He confesses himself that the moral crept in of itself, and that he "wasn't going to write in this way when he began." In other words, the story grew as it chose, from month to month, and dragged its author after it. And this explains its failure to stop when it should. The logical end of the book is Rawdon Crawley's appointment to the Governorship of Coventry Island, and the regathering of the threads—over 150 pages—is a wanton and tedious operation.

So far as its construction goes, *Vanity Fair* is a novel of adventure, of adventure in society, where hearts and banks are broken more easily than heads or dynasties; and despite his own declaration that he wanted to make "a set of people living without God in the world," the book has not a plan or motive in the sense that Balzac and the moderns have understood it. For Thackeray, although he might, and he chose, have studied the *Comédie Humaine*, remained old-fashioned to the end, and let his personages wander up and down as they listed, content if only he could

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now and again slip in a sentiment, or castigate a favourite vice on his own account. But the charge commonly brought against *Vanity Fair* that it is heartless and cynical cannot be sustained for a moment. A novel of manners does not exhaust the whole of human life, and Thackeray had a perfect right to choose such puppets for his shows as aroused his keenest interest. Nor is the book merely a novel of manners; it is a satire as well. The author does not ask his readers to profess sympathy with his ruffians. He demands no more than an appreciation of a witty presentment and of deft draughtsmanship. If he had suppressed the sentiment, which ever rose up in his heart, *Vanity Fair* might have been as un-moral as *The Way of the World*, and what a masterpiece it would have been! Even Amelia, a very Niobe of tears, is drawn with a cold contempt, and I am not certain that she is not as savage a piece of satire as Becky herself.

But Thackeray, though he loved to masquerade as a man of the world, could not help looking even at his own creations with an eye of pity or dislike. He plays the same part in his books as is played in Greek tragedy by a chorus of tiresome elders, and it is this constant intrusion which gives certain passages in *Vanity Fair* a rakish, almost a battered, air. The reader would never dream of taking such persons as Rawdon and his Aunt seriously, were he not told to do so by the author of their being. The reader, had he been allowed, would have been content with an artistic appreciation. But, says Thackeray, "as we

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bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform and talk about them; if they are good and kindly, to love them, and shake them by the hand." And that is what he is too often—a man and a brother; he forgets the impartiality of the artist, and goes about babbling with his own puppets.

These excesses of sentiment are plain for all to see. They interrupt the progress of the story with irritating frequency. They put a needless accent upon what is called the "cynicism" of Thackeray, and confuse the very simple method of the book. "Picture to yourself, oh fair young reader," exclaims the author of Miss Crawley, "a worldly, selfish, graceless, thankless, religionless old woman, writhing in pain and fear, and without her wig. Picture her to yourself, and ere you be old, learn to love and pray." The reference to the wig betrays an animus which should never disturb a novelist's serenity, and Miss Crawley is otherwise so well drawn that she might safely be left to point her own moral. So on another page he reminds us, with his eye upon the obvious, that "the bustle, and triumph, and laughter, and gaiety which Vanity Fair exhibits in public do not always pursue the performer into private life." And from this point of view he defines the purpose of his romance. "This, dear friends and companions," so he writes in his most intimate style, "is my amiable object—to walk with you through the Fair, to examine the shops and the shows there; and that we should all come home after

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the flare, and the noise, and the gaiety, and be perfectly miserable in private." But why should we be miserable—in private or public—about that in which our interest is, or should be, purely artistic?

However, he is so closely set upon disquisition that he cannot refrain the hand of sentiment even from the character of Rawdon Crawley, whose rough, amiable brutality might have been pictured without a flaw. When the guardsman, who shot Captain Marker, visits Queen's Crawley with his Rebecca, even he, under the auspices of Thackeray, is somewhat abashed. "What recollections of boyhood and innocence might have been flitting across his brain?" asks the novelist. "What pangs of dim remorse and doubt and shame?" If elsewhere the excellent Rawdon is drawn with justice, no pangs of remorse or shame would have flitted across his brain, and the character is weakened by each attempt made by the author's sentimentality to weaken that "spirit of oneness" which should animate it. We resent the interpolation of moral comment, even when Amelia is the moralist's excuse. "By heavens! it is pitiful," exclaims Thackeray, "the bootless love of women for children in Vanity Fair." What is all this but a confession of weakness. A story which needs annotation fails of its main purpose, and the reader may justly feel irritated who is not left to form his own conclusions.

It is especially in satire that sermonising has no place, for satire is of itself a method of reproof. Though Aristophanes at times laid aside the lash for

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the lyre, he knew the limits of his *genre* too well to lapse into moral discourses. But Thackeray acts the sheep-dog to his own characters. He plays propriety before them, very much as Miss Briggs ensured the public respectability of Becky Sharp. And when he is angry with them, he scolds them with almost a shrewish tongue. But, despite this concession to his own and the popular taste, Thackeray—with *Vanity Fair*—well deserved the place which he won in the literature of his age. Its style, peculiarly simple and straightforward, was free both from rhetoric and ornament. It suppressed all the tricks of the novelist, and threw what discredit it could upon fine writing. At the same time, it was various enough to express the diverse persons and changing emotions which are the material of the book. The characters are as distinguished as the style. Seldom in the history of English romance had a more genteel company been gathered together, and even when it is disreputable, it is still the best of bad company. Moreover, it is characteristic of the author that for all his moralisings he is most sincerely interested in his blackguards. He cares so little himself for Amelia [1] that he cannot expect to awake an appreciation in his readers; while

[1] There is little doubt that Thackeray despised Amelia. When *Vanity Fair* was being published, "he used to talk about it" to Liddell and his wife, "and what he should do with the persons." Mrs. Liddell said one day: "Oh, Mr. Thackeray, you must let Dobbin marry Amelia." "Well," he replied, "he shall, and when he has got her, he will not find her worth having." See Dean Liddell's *Life*, p. 8.

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Dobbin, for all his nobility, is purposely awkward where he is not ridiculous.

But Becky Sharp, always the central figure of the book, is drawn with a firmer hand and brighter colours. You must travel far indeed before you find so good a portrait of the incarnate minx. When she is off the stage the action languishes; the squalor of Queen's Crawley, the grimness of Gaunt House, hold our attention merely as they affect the true heroine of the book. When first she appears, flinging the "dixonary" out of the window, the true note of her character is struck, and never once does it ring false. "She was small and slight in person," thus she is described; "pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down: when they looked up, they were very large, odd, and attractive." They had already done execution upon the curate, and they were ready to vanquish fat Jos. Sedley, or a whole wilderness of Crawleys. In truth, there was scarce a member of that aristocratic family which did not instantly succumb to her artillery. In less than a year she had won the Baronet's confidence; she was a *trouvaille* in the eyes of Miss Crawley; the Captain was wild about her; and even Mrs. Bute was never happy out of her sight. Her airs and graces, delicately touched by French influence, were irresistible, and "when she was agitated, and alluded to her maternal relative, she spoke with ever so slight a foreign accent, which gave a great charm to her clear, ringing voice."

Thus with success she assumed a certainty of manner which, though natural to her, was unsuspected

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by her early friends. When first she encountered George Osborne, after a sojourn in Hampshire, she bullied him in fine style. "But, oh! Mr. Osborne, what a difference eighteen months' experience makes! eighteen months spent, pardon me for saying so, with gentlemen." How admirably, too, she comports herself in the first strong situation of the book, when she is forced to confess her marriage to Sir Pitt! "I can't be your wife, sir," says she, with exquisite humility; "let me—let me be your daughter." And when she is married, and exiled from the world of the Crawleys, with what skill does she manage the sharper's victims, with what address does she present Mrs. Crawley's husband to society! Then, again, the campaign which she conducts at Brussels—that little campaign within a great one—is as triumphant as the Duke's. She manages friends and foes with equal success and effrontery; the famous ball is her peculiar victory; she insults Amelia, while she captures the heart of the cad, Amelia's husband; and, best of all, she repels the interested advances of Lady Bareacres, with an insolence which enchants you, though it prove her lack of breeding.

Like all the great, she is without scruple and without pity. She robs Briggs as cheerfully as she ruins Raggles, and she permits no consideration of kindness or loyalty to interrupt her intrigue. In brief, she is rare among the creations of Thackeray because she is uniform and homogeneous. Even Rawdon feels the twinges of remorse, but Becky knows no remorse save failure. When she attends Sir Pitt's funeral at

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Queen's Crawley, she lets her mind wander back to the past in a spirit of gratulation. "I have passed beyond it, because I have brains," thought she, "and almost all the rest of the world are fools." Brilliant as is her conquest of the Marquis, she reveals the adventuress yet more splendidly in her victory over Sir Pitt the younger. "You remain a baronet," says she to him. "No, Sir Pitt Crawley, I know you better. I know your talents and ambition. You fancy you hide them both: but you can conceal neither from me. I showed Lord Steyne your pamphlet on Malt." So the trap is laid in sight of the bird, baited with praise and approached by vanity. But Becky never falls below her opportunity: her entry into Gaunt House is superb; and the moment of her greatest triumph, when she sits at the grand exclusive table with his Royal Highness, and is served on gold plate, is worth the years of intrigue which had achieved it. There is a certain attraction even in her *dégringolade*, and though one wishes she had not tried to fascinate Lord Steyne anew, she shows a fine spirit of gaiety and courage in the sombre atmosphere of Pumpernickel. "She was at home with everybody in the place—pedlars, punters, tumblers, students, and all." Though her adversaries were meaner, and the stakes lower, she was still playing the same game of life which she played against the Marquis of Steyne, and, after her fashion, she was a winner to the end.

Such is the central figure of *Vanity Fair*, and some others, though they do but enhance Rebecca's splendour, are drawn with an equally sure hand.

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Throughout the book there is a sense of life touched by caricature, which has kept it fresh in an age of changed morals and different taste. Above all, Thackeray shows himself an adept in bringing his characters on the scene, and in setting forth their dominant traits in half-a-dozen lines. At Rawdon Crawley's first appearance, the reader has an intimate acquaintance with that deboshed dragoon. "A perfect and celebrated 'blood,' or dandy about town, was this young officer. Boxing, rat-hunting, the fives' court,[1] and four-in-hand were the fashion of the British aristocracy; and he was an adept in all these noble sciences. And though he belonged to the Household troops, who, as it was their duty to rally round the Prince Regent, had not shown their valour in foreign service yet, Rawdon Crawley had already (*à propos* of play, of which he was immoderately fond) fought three bloody duels, in which he gave ample proofs of his contempt for death." This passage puts you on terms with the hero at once, and your acquaintance is cemented by Becky's own comment:

[1] The Fives' Court does not mean the home of the innocent sport pursued by Cavanagh. It was the haunt of the Fancy, and there the prize-fighters had their tournaments. The following lines describe its character eloquently enough:—

> "I've left the Fives' Court rush—the flash—the rally;
> The noise of 'Go it, Jack'—the stop—the blow—
> The shout—the chattering hit—the check—the sally."

They are to be found in Peter Corcoran's *The Fancy* (1820), the work of J. H. Reynolds, the friend of Keats. Jack, it may be noted in passing, is Randall, the Nonpareil, the hero "good with both hands, and only ten stone four."

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"Well, he is a very large young dandy. He is six feet high, and speaks with a great voice, and swears a great deal; and orders about the servants, who all adore him nevertheless."

Such was the Samson whose locks his Becky sheared, and his gradual submission is the one pathetic episode of the book. He is not very wise. His single talent is for gaming, and though his constant success suggested a charge of foul play, the charge was never justified. At the beginning of a game he would play carelessly, but his style was transformed by loss, and he always got up from the table a winner. At billiards he pursued the same tactics. "Like a great general," says Thackeray, "his genius used to rise with the danger, and when the luck had been unfavourable to him for a whole game, and the bets were consequently against him, he would with consummate skill and boldness make some prodigious hits which would restore the battle, and come in a victor at the end, to the astonishment of everybody—of everybody, that is, who was a stranger to his play." Becky, in fact, was the one adversary to whom he succumbed, and it was his simple devotion that undid him. At first he believed in her affection with a childlike faith, but, as she gradually deserted him, he was driven to a more equal alliance with his son. Nor did he recover his senses until he was trapped to the sponging-house, in which crisis of his fate he bore himself as a soldier and a gentleman. Rawdon Crawley, in brief, is not merely sympathetic, he is also true to life. Now, this is the more striking, since *Vanity Fair* is composed in

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varying planes of caricature. The elder Sir Pitt and Dobbin, for instance, do not inhabit the same world, while the atmosphere which Peggy O'Dowd breathes is not the same as enwraps the Lady Jane. In other words, burlesque and realism jostle up and down the book, and it is not always easy to interpret the author's meaning. But Rawdon, despite certain extravagances of diction and manner, is more of a man than the most of those whom he encounters, and he finds no worthy rival outside the works of Thackeray. Compare him to Sir Mulberry Hawk or the bucks of Bulwer, and in a moment you will realise his superiority. And though many a writer has tried his hand since at the delineation of the British dandy, frozen in Lord Dundreary to a type, Rawdon Crawley holds his own after fifty years.

With the same ease Thackeray presents his other characters. No sooner does old Sir Pitt shoulder Becky's trunk than we know him for what he is. The author, indeed, saves his baronet from improbability by introducing him to a note of extravagant caricature; and after his supper with Mrs. Tinker nothing that he does or says can surprise us. But that is due rather to Thackeray's skill than to the old man's verisimilitude. If we may believe Charles Kingsley, Sir Pitt is "almost the only exact portrait in the book"; and yet you will match him more nearly in the Restoration comedy than in modern Hampshire. He might well have sat upon the bench with Sir John Brute. "Who do you call a drunken fellow, you slut you?" asks Sir John of his wife;

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"I'm a man of quality; the King has made me a knight."[1] Is not that boast composed in precisely the same spirit as Sir Pitt's introduction to Becky? "He, he! *I*'m Sir Pitt Crawley. Reklect you owe me a pint for bringing down your luggage. He, he! Ask Tinker if I ain't."

The Rev. Bute is painted in more modest colours: "A tall, stately, jolly, shovel-hatted man," was he, who "had a fine voice, sang 'A southerly wind and a cloudy sky,' and gave the whoop in chorus with general applause. He rode to hounds in a pepper-and-salt frock, and was one of the best fishermen in the county." But Thackeray is at his best with the Crawleys, and all save the younger Pitt, who is monstrous, carry the blood of human life in their veins. Miss Crawley, an admirable specimen of the selfish worldling, trained to egoism by wealth and Jacobin literature, never rings false save in the comments of her creator, while "the eager, active, black-faced" Mrs. Bute, "the smart, active little body who wrote her husband's sermons," is a more pestilent schemer than Becky herself, without Becky's wit or Becky's fascination. Excellent, too, though in another vein, are the Osbornes, father and son. True, the British merchant is a trifle conventional; but the young soldier, who would be a gentleman, is assuredly one of the best (or worst) cads in fiction.

It is, then, for a set of well-drawn characters, touched one and all with caricature, that we especially value *Vanity Fair;* yet in praising the characters we

[1] See Sir John Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife*, Act iv. sc. iv.

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must not forget the situations in which they play their part. It is said that when Thackeray wrote the scene wherein Rawdon Crawley surprises his wife with Lord Steyne he exclaimed, "By Jove! that's genius." And with some right, since he had led up to that memorable crisis with far more than his usual skill. Still better, and far less showy, is the episode of Waterloo, in which, for the first time, Thackeray proved how well he could give a romantic turn to history. The modern novelist, if he pitched upon the year 1815 for his period, would make no scruple of dragging Napoleon and Wellington upon his mimic scene. He would be intrepid enough to make these heroes talk the commonest platitudes to their friends; he would vulgarise their speeches by the accent of his own suburb; or in the other extreme he would present them as the dummies of a pedantic archæologist. Thackeray's method is vastly more artistic. The chapters in which the drama of Waterloo is presented are dominated by great events, but only the distant rumble of the guns is heard, and the reader never gets nearer to the battle-field than Brussels. In other words, Thackeray does not lose hold of his own personages. He has no desire to show how they affect history—that is the foolish method of the historical novelist; he prefers to show how history affects them—a much more reasonable process. When you recall his description of Waterloo, it is Jos. Sedley's spirited escape and the poor, silly Amelia's tragedy that leap to your mind. "No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on

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the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart." That gives us a more vivid vision of the battle than the mock heroics of a false Napoleon, and is truer, besides, both to fiction and to fact.

Vanity Fair is not, broadly speaking, a *roman à clef*, but the ingenious have identified certain characters, and there is no doubt that Thackeray owed something of his inspiration to living men and women. At the same time, it is rash to push resemblances too far: as did the foolish gossip who detected Charlotte Brontë in Becky Sharp, and declared that Rochester was a portrait, drawn in revenge, of Thackeray himself. That is reducing a hazardous method to absurdity; yet Thackeray did not overlook his contemporaries, and even Becky is said to have had her original. "One morning a hansom drove up to the door," says Mrs. Ritchie, "and out of it there emerged the most charming, dazzling little lady dressed in black, who greeted my father with great affection and brilliancy, and who, departing presently, gave my father a large bunch of fresh violets." The "dazzling little lady" was supposed to be Becky, though Thackeray, of course, never confessed that a model sat for his heroine; but Dobbin's amiability absolved his author from reticence, and there is no doubt that John Allen, Archdeacon of Salop, Thackeray's friend and contemporary at Cambridge, suggested some traits of the awkward, unselfish major. These resemblances, however, are slight and unimportant. The Marquis of Steyne and Mr. Wenham, on the other hand, have

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been generally recognised for Lord Hertford and Mr. Croker, and they better than any others will show how Thackeray turned biography into fiction. They are the more interesting, too, because they were sketched, almost in competition, with the Monmouth and Rigby of that master in ironic portraiture, Benjamin Disraeli, whose knowledge of the men was more profound, and whose touch was at once more brilliant and more savage than Thackeray's.

When *Coningsby* was published, in 1844, Thackeray reviewed it with considerable contempt in *The Pictorial Times*. He declared that the author had "all the qualities of Pitt and Byron and Burke and the great Mr. Widdicombe of Batty's amphitheatre." "Everybody was reading the book," said he, "because everybody recognises everybody's portrait." The review is manifestly unfair when we remember that very soon afterwards Thackeray was trying his own hand at the presentation of the Marquis of Hertford, and of the gentleman whom he calls "the Right Honourable John Wilson Joker." It is true that Thackeray allows himself a wider latitude than his rival. Yet it is impossible to mistake the original of Steyne and Wenham, and Thackeray must share the reproach, if reproach be deserved, which he heaps upon Mr. Disraeli.[1] Nor has Thackeray the same

[1] One passage in Thackeray's review might be justly referred, without the change of a syllable, to *Vanity Fair*. "What person is there," wrote the reviewer, "in town or country, from the squire down to the lady's maid, who will not be anxious to peruse a work in which the secrets of high life are so exposed? In all the fash-

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excuse as his rival of complete success. Neither the great noble nor the obsequious parasite of *Vanity Fair* is touched with his happiest hand. It is evident that he spent little care upon the portraiture of Lord Steyne, who is less a man than a bundle of vices and brutality. The prejudices which deformed *The Book of Snobs* are here very wide awake, and you cannot but think that in the gross traits of the Marquis the author is expressing his general dislike of the class to which the Marquis belongs. It is not as though the drama were facilitated by the ruffianly behaviour and aspect of Becky's lover. A man is always more effective than a monster, and Steyne's monstrosity is palliated by very few touches of humanity. He is too much an affair of buck-teeth and bushy whiskers. A scowl too often "gathers over his heavy brow." His jaw is so infamously underhung that you are surprised his friends do not send for the police at his first apparition. Yet he is represented as the friend of "the most august personages," and as the daring rival of Mr. Fox at hazard. His moral aspect is far worse even than his physical. It is his pleasant pastime to bully women and children. For instance, he heartily disliked Becky's boy. "When they met by mischance he made sarcastic bows or remarks to the child, or glared at him with savage-looking eyes." Here, indeed, we are at close quarters with the ogre of the fairy story, and with the best intentions in the

ionable novels ever published there is nothing so piquant or so magnificently genteel. Every politician, too, will read with avidity —the details are so personal."

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world we can no longer put faith in my Lord Steyne.

Yet worse remains. When Becky confesses to the Marquis that she has ruined Briggs his comment is: "Ruined her? then why don't you turn her out?" Now, though many a man might have cherished this amiable thought, none, with the habit of life, would have given it utterance, least of all to a woman who flattered a passing fancy. Absurd, also, is his behaviour at Gaunt House, whose ladies he addresses in a tone which would disgrace an angry bricklayer; and at each excess the reader's faith grows weaker. After all, the Marquis of Steyne is described as a great noble, who has lived with princes and conducted embassies; and though the manners of the Regent's Court were free enough, they were not marked by the savagery, inseparable from this ruffian of eyebrows and hideous grins. In fiction you expect verisimilitude, and a novelist is not easily credible who paints you Bill Sykes and writes the Marquis of Steyne beneath the portrait.

To Thackeray Steyne was but an incidental character. Monmouth is the essence of Disraeli's *Coningsby*, and is drawn with extraordinary diligence and insight. It is not astonishing, therefore, that where Thackeray presented a monster, Disraeli presented a man. Steyne is symbolised by a tooth. Monmouth is a *grand seigneur*, with a taste for evil courses. His aspect, if forbidding, is still magnificent, and his temper, while autocratic, is never brutal. He evades scenes as eagerly as Lord Steyne courts them, since it

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is more agreeable to his dignity to have his own way without argument; and he never forgets his nobility, even though he is inexorable in revenge or hate. His fine manners fascinate the countryside, and for a selfish man his good humour is remarkable. But none dare take advantage of his amiability. Even Coningsby finds him "superb and icy"; and it is not surprising, for he is one "whose contempt for mankind was absolute,—not a fluctuating sentiment, not a mournful conviction ebbing and flowing with circumstances, but a fixed, profound, unalterable instinct."

Monmouth, in fact, is plainly drawn from the life: he has many traits, perfectly consistent with each other, which mark him out from the rest of his kind. Rich as he is, lofty as is his position, he exhibits a signal weakness in his love of gold. The experience of a worldly life has taught him that a rich man cannot be bought, and that which you cannot buy becomes invested in his eyes "with a kind of halo amounting almost to sanctity." So bitterly heartless is he that he cannot tolerate the presence of any woman more than two years, and when he is struck with a fatal illness at his villa at Richmond, he has no better company about him than Clotilde, Ermengarde, and their kind.

For the rest, he is pictured as lavish, dissolute, ease-loving, and tyrannical. He is not exacting, since he demands of his family no more than obedience, and of others no more than that they should divert him. "Members of this family," says he to Coningsby,

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"may think as they like, but they must act as I please;" while at the same time he tolerates Villebecque and all his friends, if only they distract his mind. Above all, he is determined to avoid anything that is disagreeable; and it is this resolve which explains the power and influence of Rigby, who is a loyal buffer between his lordship and the sordid troubles of life. Physically, too, he is a man, not a bogey, though he has a certain glance "under which men always quailed." It is thus that he presents himself to his nephew: "He was in height above the middle size, but was somewhat portly and corpulent. His countenance was strongly marked: sagacity on the brow, sensuality in the mouth and jaw. His head was bald, but there were remains of the rich brown locks on which he once prided himself. His large deep blue eyes, madid and yet piercing, showed that the secretions of his brain were apportioned, half to voluptuousness, half to common-sense. But his general mien was truly grand—full of a natural nobility, of which no one was more sensible than himself." There is a man seen and studied, no mere phantom of ugliness and bad morals.

It is Monmouth's chief merit to be like a man. His accurate resemblance to Lord Hertford gives him an incidental interest. And no student of the early nineteenth century can deny the excellence of the portrait. Yet the real Hertford was a far more amazing creature than his literary portraits suggest. At first sight the conflicting testimonies seem irreconcilable. Says Greville: "His life and death were

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equally disgusting and revolting to every good and moral feeling." Says Croker: "I never knew a man so fixed upon doing what he considered his duty." Here are the extremes, each biassed by personal and political prejudice. But Hertford's character will always remain unintelligible, until its progress and decay are both recognised. In his youth, under the title of Yarmouth, familiarly translated as Red Herrings, he was among the most brilliant of the Regent's Court, and was honestly declared to be "the most good-natured man alive." Gifted with a better intelligence and a stronger temperament than his fellows, he more than held his own, whether at cards or talk, with the dandies of his time. The manners of the age, no doubt, were loose enough; but Hertford was no worse than Brummel, Scrope Davies and the rest, who are not held up to public shame. Even his enemies allowed him a talent for gaiety, which made his parties the most agreeable in London; and at cards his supremacy was incontestable: he won large sums, because he always played a cool and shrewd game. He married, too early for a man of pleasure, the famous Maria Fagniani, and with her he inherited the ample fortune bequeathed by the two bucks who claimed to be her father. The marriage was unhappy, and Lady Hertford was for many years the *maîtresse en titre* of Marshal Junot. But it could not well have prospered, since Hertford, like Monmouth, did not long endure the society of any woman.

Meanwhile, for all his gaiety and his gambling, he

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was sent to Paris and elsewhere as Envoy Extraordinary, he was appointed Lord Warden of the Stannaries, he held more than one office in the Household, and, though he is a favourite subject for the political satirist (as what Tory was not?), he is not always held up to contempt. One set of doggerel verses, indeed, picture him as kicking the Regent for his infamous behaviour to a lady—a piece of daring chivalry, such as is seldom put down to his credit. However, in 1822 he succeeded to his father's wealth and influence, was given the Garter, and asserted his position as a great noble with all the pomp and ceremony which he could command. Thus far he had been guilty of no act unworthy a courtier, and so stern a moralist as Peel gave him an unsolicited testimonial, of which any man might be proud. "I was really pleased at Lord Hertford's getting the Garter," wrote the statesman. "I was pleased very disinterestedly, and for his own sake merely, for I like him. He is a gentleman, and not an every-day one."

But presently the love of pleasure dominated his intellect. His cynical contempt for mankind was expressed in a basely crapulous life, which has eclipsed the record of his good qualities. After the passing of the Reform Bill he renounced politics, and took a dislike of England; wherefore he wandered up and down France and Italy with a band of demireps and parasites for his camp-followers. Like Steyne, he was haunted by the fear of madness, which he had inherited along with his wealth and his titles; nor is there any doubt that the excesses of his last years were the result of

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senile insanity.[1] At the end he was scarce his own master, and in the last letter addressed to Croker he betrays his own helplessness. "I believe we are going to change, because they say so, but I don't know." There is a genuine pathos in this surrender of a once masterful man. He who had exacted obedience from all now bowed before the fancy of the last favourite that chance sent him. But he atoned for this passing weakness by the ferocity of his will, a monument of posthumous brutality and cynical insolence, which advertised his vices and his savagery even more loudly than did the habit of his life. Yet a vast line of carriages followed his remains out of London, and among them, to the great scandal of the Duke of Bedford, was the carriage of Sir Robert Peel, who had remained faithful in his admiration, and who doubtless would have agreed with Wellington that "had Hertford lived in London, instead of frittering away his time in Paris, he would have become Prime Minister of England."[2] Such was the original of

[1] "The lamentable doings of his later years," wrote Croker, "were neither more nor less than *insanity*. You know, and he was himself well aware, that there is hereditary madness in the family. He often talked and even wrote about it to me."

[2] See Gronow's *Reminiscences* (1890), vol. ii. p. 323: "Ah," added the Duke of Wellington, "Lord Hertford is a man of extraordinary talent. He deserves to be classed among those men who possess transcendent abilities. What a pity it is that he does not live more in England, and occupy his place in the House of Lords. It was only the other day that Sir Robert Peel observed when speaking of Hertford that he was a man of great comprehension; not only versed in the sciences, but able to animate his mass of knowledge by a bright and active imagination."

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Thackeray's Steyne and Disraeli's Monmouth, and while Steyne is overshadowed by Monmouth, Wenham is completely eclipsed by Rigby, than whom a fiercer caricature was never drawn.

Mr. Wenham, the satellite, is a sketch faintly discerned in the background. He is neither finished with care nor informed with venom. He is mean enough, to be sure, but commonplace in his meanness. The portrait, in brief, has neither the force nor the rascality which distinguish Mr. Nicholas Rigby, the villain of *Coningsby*, after whom rather than after nature it seems to be drawn. Of course Wenham's admiration for his master is liberally expressed. He declares that his excellent friend, the Marquis of Steyne, is "one of the most generous and kindest men in the world, as he is one of the greatest." When he swears "upon his honour and word as a gentleman" he "puts his hand on his waistcoat with a parliamentary air," and he sings his patron's praises to Rawdon Crawley "with the same fluent oratory" wherewith he attempts to abash the House of Commons, and with as little effect. But, as the excellent Captain Macmurdo observed, he "don't stick at a trifle," and maybe his respect for the Marquis is as genuine as "one of Mrs. Wenham's headaches." Nevertheless, he serves his master well, and he saves a scandal with an adroitness which deceives neither Macmurdo nor his principal. Indeed, had he not led the Colonel into an ambush of bailiffs, his conduct, contemptible enough, would not have been disgraceful. Yet the intention is clear. The parliamentary

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manner, the facile eloquence, the cheerful subservience to the best and greatest of men, proclaim that Thackeray when he sketched Wenham had in his mind's eye the conventional portrait of John Wilson Croker.

Rigby, on the other hand, almost defeats his creator's animosity. He is so base as to be almost superhuman. He is the parasite incarnate, vilely obsequious to the great man his patron, truculently offensive to everybody else. He has allowed Lord Monmouth to buy him body and soul, "with his clear head, his indefatigable industry, his audacious tongue, and his ready and unscrupulous pen; with all his dates, all his lampoons, all his private memoirs, and all his political intrigues." There is no office too menial for his performance, if only his master require it, and a word or a dinner is enough to atone for the degradation of the most odious service. At his lordship's command he is always ready with a "slashing" article, and who is so good at a slashing article as Rigby? Or he will bore a country audience with the French Rovolution, which is his *forte*, or he will cheerfully denounce as un-English all the views wherewith he is not in agreement. So, incapable of dignity, strange to honour, ignorant of generosity, he scales the height of his ambition and becomes his patron's executor. Here is his apotheosis, here is the halo placed upon his head, at the expense of good feeling and independence. In most transactions "there is some portion which no one cares to accomplish, and which everybody wishes to be achieved."

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And this is Rigby's portion, which he achieves without a murmur of complaint, and for which he is rewarded by a comfortable legacy and much scandal.

Now, the venom of this portrait lies in its half-truth. Croker was as good at a "slashing article" as Rigby himself; he, too, was the obliging friend of the great; he, too, took the keenest delight in political intrigue. But while all that Rigby accomplished is turned to his dishonour, Croker was a useful public servant, a sound man of letters, and a politician of keen though narrow intelligence. His gift of organisation was conspicuous. He proved himself an excellent Secretary to the Admiralty; he helped to establish *The Quarterly Review*;[1] and he was the effective founder of the Athenæum Club. *Noscitur a sociis*, and he cannot be wholly bad who is the associate of Wellington, Peel, Scott, and Lockhart. The great Duke, indeed, regarded Croker as his oldest and closest friend, and there is no great man of that age whose

[1] It was in *The Quarterly* that Croker did his best work, and though his judgment in politics was generally sound, it was marred by an habitual violence of expression. Malevolence was so deeply ingrained in him, that he was unconscious of its use, and, in truth, it was a fault of style rather than a depravation of thought. At the same time, *The Quarterly* would have been better without him. Sir Walter Scott, who loved the man, saw at the very outset how great a danger he was to *The Quarterly*. Yet after thirty years he was still supplying sixty-four pages to each number, and sprinkling the articles of others from the pepper-box of his abuse. Lockhart resigned himself humbly to be "over-Crokered." It took the courage of Elwin, a country parson, to get rid of him, and even Elwin allowed that he had "fine and generous elements in his nature."

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house and society Croker did not frequent. His friendship with Hertford was of old standing, and on Croker's side disinterested; and since Hertford was a man of cultivation as well as of pleasure, the friend of poets and of Ministers, his acquaintance was not of itself a disgrace to any one. Moreover, for many years the Secretary of the Admiralty managed the Marquis's estates, and took not a penny for his trouble. Even the prosecution of Suisse, the blackguardly valet who, with the aid of one of Hertford's cast-off mistresses, Angeline Borel, had stolen many thousands of pounds, was an act of courage. Croker could not profit by the case, which inevitably involved him in an ugly scandal. Yet he did not shrink from an executor's duty, and has stood in the pillory ever since.

He has been attacked by common consent. Nor is party spite enough to explain the malevolence of his critics.[1] Macaulay, of course, attacked him because he did not like his political views, and made no attempt to hide his malice. "See whether I do not dust that varlet's jacket for him in the next number

[1] At least one political opponent has sung his praises. "Croker," wrote Lord Brougham, "was a most important person in Opposition. Nothing could exceed his ability and his thorough knowledge of his subject. . . . His talents were of a very high order, and have not, I think, been sufficiently allowed. He was also a man of great personal kindness to his friends, though a good hater of his enemies, and so much devoted to his opinions that he voluntarily retired from Parliament as soon as the Reform Bill passed, and he never returned." In this tribute there is nothing to suggest either Wenham or Rigby.

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of Blue and Yellow," he wrote, before the *Boswell* appeared; "I detest him more than cold boiled veal." But Disraeli was not influenced by public animosity, and Thackeray (maybe) did no more than follow Disraeli's lead. What, then, is the cause of this fierce and various hostility? *The Quarterly* is partly to blame. For many years it was the world's habit to ascribe all harsh criticisms to the single pen of Croker. It is an old trick, as common now as then, but assuredly it put upon Croker many an undeserved affront. But *The Quarterly*, at its bitterest, was insufficient to arouse the cloud of obloquy which enveloped Croker. It must be confessed also that his temperament was unsympathetic. He liked to have a finger in everybody's pie, and he possessed a curious talent for making himself indispensable to the great. Not that he was subservient. In fact his independence of spirit shines clearly in every page of his *Memoirs*. But he found himself more at ease and proved himself more agreeable among his superiors than among his equals, and it was this faculty more than any other that rendered him unpopular. But in face of odium he betrayed no resentment. When Thackeray was not elected to the Athenæum, Croker interfered in his favour, and when the libel of *Conings by* was pointed out to him many years after its publication, he declared that he never read novels, and heard of Rigby for the first time!

Thus, chiefly because he was contemptuous and morose, Croker has been held up by two novelists as the vilest of men. Thackeray's Wenham, like

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Thackeray's Steyne, is but a partial portrait, which reproduces no more than one imagined trait. It suggests neither slashing articles nor political fidelity. It suggests neither undigested learning nor a taste for the French Revolution, and it must be confessed that Rigby, like Monmouth, is far closer to the original. And this enables us to contrast Disraeli's method with Thackeray's. Disraeli, when he drew a character from life, drew it with his eye unrelentingly fixed upon the object. Thackeray, on the other hand, was content with a suggestion, and declared that "he never consciously *copied* anybody." Yet with *Coningsby* before him, he cannot evade the responsibility of Steyne and Wenham, though these, to be sure, are remote enough to be innocuous.

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CHAPTER V

PENDENNIS. THACKERAY AND THE WORLD OF LETTERS

MEANWHILE Thackeray had deserted Bohemia for Tyburnia or its outskirts. In other words, he had exchanged the lodging of a bachelor for a house in Kensington, and was overjoyed at his prosperity. The letters addressed about this time to Mrs. Brookfield reveal an exultant happiness, tempered now and again by "blue devils," which is very agreeable to contemplate. No man ever took a keener pleasure in increased wealth and growing fame than did Thackeray, and he expresses his pleasure with an almost boyish simplicity. He frequents the houses of the great with a pride which neither Mr. Pendennis nor Clive Newcome could surpass, and if it were not for the humour of the situation, whereof he was perfectly conscious, he might have afforded material for another chapter of *The Book of Snobs*. One day he is "to dine with the Dowager Duchess of Bedford, afterwards to Mrs. Procter's, afterwards to Lady Granville's." Another day it is the Duke of Devonshire, or Sir Robert Peel, or Lord Lansdowne who seeks his company. He is naïvely delighted when he is pointed out with the finger. "Lady C., beautiful, serene, stupid old lady," he writes; "she asked, Isn't

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that the great Mr. Thackeray? O! my stars, think of that!" So he accepted the *rôle* of the great Mr. Thackeray without a shred of false modesty, and exclaimed in the proper phrase of the time, "What a jaunty off-hand satiric rogue I am to be sure,—and a gay young dog." He was so gay a young dog that all houses were open to him, and his attitude towards life and society is at once more amiable and just than his books suggest. He is content with good company of whatever sort it be, and after dining sumptuously at the table of a "fortunate youth," "the young men," he writes, "were clever, very frank and gentlemanlike; quite as pleasant companions as one deserves to meet, and as for your humble servant, he saw a chapter or two of *Pendennis* in some of them." Nor is he blind to the advantages of his social eminence. It even strikes him, as his daughter sorts the cards in the chimney-glass, "that there are people who would give their ears, or half their incomes, to go to these fine places."

Abroad, as at home, he is accorded the respect due to a great man. In Paris "the Embassy is wonderfully civil; Lord Normanby is my dearest friend," and he watches the Opera from Rothschild's box. And then he escapes from his smart friends to spend an evening with Jules Janin, whom once he flayed in the interest of Dickens, and who now delights him. Janin tells him that he is always entirely happy, that he had never known repentance or satiety, and Thackeray sketches an enchanting portrait of him, which is very far from Balzac's bitter satire. He

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pictures him "bouncing about the room, gesticulating, joking, gasconading, quoting Latin, pulling out his books, which are very handsome, and tossing about his curling brown hair;—a magnificent, jolly, intelligent face, such as would suit Pan, I should think, a flood of humorous, rich, jovial talk." In either capital he sees the best, and the best of many kinds. His catholicity, in life at least, is remarkable. He meets Sir Robert Peel at a picture-gallery, and who do you think is the next person with whom he shakes hands? Why, Mrs. Rhodes, of the Back Kitchen, and perhaps he is more at his ease with her than with the great Minister. Though his preference for the world of fashion is frank enough, he lived on terms of intimacy with many of his *confrères*. Perhaps he was never quite happy with Dickens, but until a foolish quarrel divided them they were familiar friends, and Dickens never had a more generous admirer than Thackeray. Carlyle and Macaulay, Brookfield and FitzGerald, Tennyson and the Procters, were his loyal associates, and once in Paris he cheerfully allows himself to be patronised by the great Harrison Ainsworth. Charlotte Bronté's admiration for him is notorious. He resembled Fielding, she declared, "as an eagle does a vulture." But this resemblance did not prevent her from being in great trouble about his soul. "He stirs in me both sorrow and anger," she wrote. "Why should he lead so harassing a life? Why should his mocking tongue so perversely deny the better feelings of his better moods?" Of course she took him and others too seriously, but Thackeray

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alone frightened her. In his presence, she confesses, she was "fearfully stupid," and on the evening when first she met him, "excitement and exhaustion made savage work of her." But the admiration on either side was sincere, and while she dedicated *Jane Eyre* to the author of *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray repaid the compliment by writing a touching and sympathetic introduction to *Emma*.

Happy in his friends, Thackeray was happy also in his work. There was scarce a number of *Vanity Fair* which he did not produce "with inexpressible throes." But when the work was done he took a frank pleasure in it. He highly approved the simplicity of his style, and he never grew tired of his own characters. On one occasion he re-reads *The Hoggarty Diamond*, and "upon my word and honour," says he, "if it doesn't make you cry, I shall have a mean opinion of you." About the same time he is going to visit the Hôtel de la Terrasse at Brussels, "where Becky used to live. I shall pass by Captain Osborne's lodging, where I recollect meeting him and his little wife, who has married again, somebody told me; but it is always the way with these *grandes passions*—Mrs. Dobbins, or some such name, she is now; always an overrated woman, I thought. How curious it is! I believe perfectly in all those people, and feel quite an interest in the inn in which they lived."

But his novel, though it brought him fame and pleasure, did not bring him wealth, and he was still dependent upon journalism for a livelihood. Though he had given up *The Examiner* in 1845, he began, in

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the very midst of *Vanity Fair*, "to blaze away in *The Chronicle* again: it's an awful bribe that five guineas an article." The novelist of to-day would doubtless turn up his nose at the poor pittance which Thackeray received for his early novels—£50 a part, 'tis said, drawings and all. And the truth is, that when he had to pay a call of £112 on an abominable Irish railway he was embarrassed to find the money. Indeed, at the very time that *Vanity Fair* was bringing him glory he was called to the Bar, in the hope, no doubt, that he, the eagle, might follow Fielding, the vulture, to the magisterial bench. But, happily, this ambition and another (of a secretaryship at the Post Office) were foiled, and Thackeray remained loyal to his true and only vocation.

No sooner was *Vanity Fair* finished than he set to work upon *Pendennis*.[1] It was written under different skies, and with varying fortune. Now, the author is delighted with his work; now, he finds it, "without any manner of doubt, awfully stupid." The fear of "Bradley, the printer, coming to dun him" is ever before him, and once, as we know from the dedication, the progress of the book was interrupted by illness. But he finished it in 1850, "very tired," as he

[1] The first number of *Pendennis* was published in November, 1848. After the eleventh number (September, 1849) there was a gap of three months, due to the author's illness, but the publication was resumed in January, 1850, and in the following December the last (a double) number made its appearance. The book is appropriately dedicated to Dr. John Elliotson, who tended the author through his illness, and "would take no other fee than thanks."

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told his mother, "weary and solemn-minded." Irksome as the task seemed, it brought with it compensations, for Thackeray was intensely interested in his own creations, and while he was writing, *Pendennis* and the world were for him one and the same. While, on the one hand, he looked upon life with the eyes of a book, on the other the personages of his story were real and beyond his control. "I wonder what will happen with Pendennis and Fanny," he writes one day; ". . . somehow it seems as if it were true. I shall know more about them to-morrow." He cannot conceal his admiration for the Major, and he is delighted to encounter a familiar friend. "At the station," says he, "whom do you think I found? Miss G——, who says she is Blanche Amory, and I think she is Blanche Amory—amiable at times, amusing, clever, and depraved." Who Miss G—— was is immaterial, but Thackeray's own comment upon the poet of *Mes Larmes* is at once curious and just.

In structure and composition *Pendennis* differs little from *Vanity Fair*, for though it is a novel with a hero, it is still a novel without a plot. It has the same motive as *Tom Jones*, *Gil Blas*, or *le Père Goriot*. In other words, it describes the impact of an enterprising, adventurous youth upon the world. But unlike the heroes of the other masterpieces I have mentioned, Pendennis moves in a formal little circle, not of his own choosing. His adventures are limited, not merely by his lack of courage, but by a narrow, ruthless convention of life. From the very first

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he is taken charge of by the tyrants of habit and custom. He is pushed along the common groove from school to college, from college to London, until he reaches the comfortable goal of fiction—a blameless marriage. When Rastignac emerged from the humble boarding-house near the Pantheon, he was fortified by the predatory philosophy of Vautrin to make war upon society. Pendennis found a mentor more circumspect than Rastignac's. His Vautrin was the admirable Major, whose cynicism conceived nothing worse than an entrance into the best houses and a rich alliance.[1] But while Rastignac remains a triumph of romantic portraiture, Pendennis ends as he began, an intelligent, meritorious young gentleman.

The one generous adventure of his life, the adoration of the Fotheringay, is properly represented as a mere boyish folly, and it is difficult to believe sin-

[1] Compare, for instance, the worldly-wise counsels which the Major administers to his nephew with the fierce exhortations of Vautrin, whose famous address to Eugène de Rastignac is the perfection of cynicism. "Voilà le carrefour de la vie, jeune homme," says he, "choisissez. Vous avez déjà choisi: vous êtes allé chez notre cousin de Beauséant, et vous y avez flairé le luxe. Vous êtes allé chez Madame de Restaud, et vous y avez flairé la Parisienne. Ce jour-là, vous êtes revenu avec un mot écrit sur votre front, et que j'ai bien su lire: *Parvenir!* parvenir à tout prix. 'Bravo!' ai-je dit, 'voilà un gaillard qui me va.' Il vous a fallu de l'argent. Où en prendre?" That question is easily resolved; and if you set this cynical rhapsody of Vautrin side by side with the Major's amiable approval of "a good name, good manners, good wits," you will understand the difference not merely between the talent of Balzac and the talent of Thackeray, but something of the difference between France and England.

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cerely in the episode of Fanny Bolton. A chance meeting at Vauxhall, the ignition of a spark in a childish heart—these are not the material of a tragedy, or even of an embroilment. What is the crisis, indeed, that could hang upon so slender a thread of fate as a kiss innocently given or a word of kindness spoken in a whisper? The truth is, that Thackeray dared not face the logic of his facts, and his readers may be forgiven if they find the situation incredible. Between Balzac and Thackeray, then, there is a wide ocean of temperament and experience, and while Thackeray timidly hugs his shore, Balzac dives into the deeps, unconscious of fear. *Le Père Goriot* is of universal significance. *Pendennis*, the book, is so severely English that it will hardly cross the Channel. Pendennis, the hero, is not merely an Englishman; he is also a blurred reflection of his author; and it is not strange, therefore, that both book and hero strike what Matthew Arnold called a note of provincialism.

For *Pendennis* is in essence an autobiography. It is, of course, an idle task to seek in the novel the author's actual experience. Whether he borrowed his own character or the character of a friend, Thackeray liberally transformed it. He was content to select a trait here, an episode there, keeping the general effect of the picture true to its model. That Pendennis was a reminiscence of himself he was quite conscious. "Being entirely occupied with my two new friends, Mrs. Pendennis and her son Mr. Arthur Pendennis," he wrote to Mrs. Brookfield, "I

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got up early again this morning, and was with them more than two hours before breakfast. He is a very good-natured and generous young fellow, and I begin to like him considerably. I wonder whether he is interesting to me from selfish reasons, and because I fancy we resemble each other in many points." Moreover, in loyalty to his own school and college, Thackeray gave Pendennis the same education he had himself enjoyed. Arthur, too, was at Grey Friars' School, distinguished as neither a dunce nor a scholar. He, too, devoured all the unprofitable literature that came in his way, and spent his pocket-money upon tarts for himself and his friends. Being naturally disposed to indolence, he cared for fighting as little as for learning; but, on the other hand, he neither told lies nor bullied little boys.

Again, when he had passed through the ordeal of love, Pendennis, like the author of his being, went to Cambridge, and the chapters which describe Pen's triumph and failure at the University are of Thackeray's best. There are many failures to prove how difficult it is to paint a picture of university life. Some remember their Alma Mater as the sad home of a priggish scholarship, while others recall their contemporaries as the riffraff of bars and race-courses. But Thackeray's sense of reality saved him from either pitfall. He accomplished his delicate task without exaggeration, and with not more than a spice of sentimentality. His Mr. Bloundell-Bloundell doesn't ring quite true; but the others—even the lordly, the extravagant, the admirable Pen himself—

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are of the genuine metal. And how just is the reminiscence evoked by "the old Oxbridge tracts"! Is it not in this spirit that one always looks back upon the first precious days of freedom to think wildly or to act foolishly? "Here is Jack moaning with despair and Byronic misanthropy, whose career at the university was one of unmixed milk-punch. Here is Tom's daring essay in defence of suicide and of republicanism in general, . . . Tom, who wears the starchiest tie in all the diocese, and would go to Smithfield rather than eat a breakfast on a Friday in Lent." And, best of all, there is Bob, "who has made a fortune in railway committees, bellowing out with Tancred and Godfrey:

> "'On to the breach, ye soldiers of the cross,
> Scale the red wall and swim the choking foss.
> Ye dauntless archers, twang your crossbows well;
> On bill and battle-axe and mangonel!
> Ply battering-ram and hurtling catapult,
> Jerusalem is ours—*il Deus vult.*'"

There is the true aspect of the University, mellowed by a knowledge of the larger world. So, too, when Thackeray brought Pendennis up to London, he kept an eye upon his own experience. Pendennis, like the author of his being, was as intimately at home in Grub Street as in Baker Street or Carlton House Terrace; he, too, born to Tyburnia, strayed awhile in the wilder province of Bohemia; he, too, visited the broken man of letters in jail, and himself knew what it was to write for his bread. Moreover, the London to which Pendennis came after his sojourn at

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Cambridge was in all respects the London of Thackeray's youth; and the curious may find a clear proof of Thackeray's fidelity to truth in the files of "Baron" Nicholson's forgotten journal, *The Town*, to name but one source of corroboration. As sketched by that amiable ruffian, London is a paradise of night-saloons and "free-and-easies." The Coal Hole, over which presided "the pleasant, agreeable Rhodes," was already the rival of the more famous Evans's, where old English ballads alternated with the improvisations of Charles Sloman, "the great little Jew."[1] There the nobs from the West End—and Pendennis among them—would finish the evening more sedately begun at ball or rout, and would even condescend to play their part in the entertainment.

In such haunts as these, then,—haunts meet for the midnight Apollo,—Thackeray sets many a scene in his drama, and his sympathy with Rhodes and his like is as plain as his understanding of them. No writer, indeed, has depicted this strange chapter in the history of manners with Thackeray's skill and verisimilitude. To compare his treatment of the theme with Nicholson's is to note the difference between the artist and the journalist. Where Thackeray presents a picture, the "Baron" affects a desire to prove that "vice rarely reigns in the human heart unaccompanied by better feelings." This desire, to be sure, was universal in that age, and Thackeray was no stranger to it. But the current literature of the day proves Thackeray the least of many offenders, and we may be

[1] See above, p. 21.

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frankly grateful to him for saving from oblivion an institution long since dead and gone. To revive the glories of Evans's and the Coal Hole, higher spirits and a livelier talent would be necessary than we can find to-day; no more will "the great improvisatore" touch off the newest comer in a neat couplet; no more will the brutality of "Sam Hall" affront the Philistine. Yet who will say that in exchanging the "free-and-easy" for the "marble hall" we have got the better of the bargain?

So with equal step Thackeray and Pendennis pace the stones of London. But that which they achieve is far less important than those whom they encounter by the way. As we have said, *Pendennis* does not depend upon its plot, and its single complication—the blackmailing of Clavering by Altamont, and Blanche Amory's legitimacy—seems a trifle out of tone. No, *Pendennis*, like *Vanity Fair*, is eminent for a set of characters, shrewdly observed and wittily drawn. In one respect it shows an advance upon *Vanity Fair*; it is more uniform; it is not composed in so many varying planes of caricature. Its *dramatis personæ*, with few exceptions, belong to the same age, and are drawn to the same scale. Yet once again Thackeray shows his interest in eccentricity and rascaldom. The best of his characters are not those who conform to the standard of the copy-book heading. In other words, he is more at home with the sinners than with the saints, and at the head of them all stands the incomparable Major, who, if he sinned, sinned in the cause of worldly success and good breeding. The

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Major, in truth, is the most vital, as he is the most entertaining, figure in the book. Amiable, heartless, honourable, cunning, he epitomises in his character and career some of the worst vices castigated in the *Book of Snobs*. But, to prove that Thackeray the artist is more sincere than Thackeray the moralist, he is drawn with rare knowledge and insight. The world in which he moves is narrow and select. Beyond the confines of his own St. James's he knows nothing, save a German Spa and half-a-dozen great houses. The society which he affects is the best and the worst. Marchionesses leave notes at his club; the young men like to walk with him down Pall Mall, "for he touched his hat to everybody, and every other man he met was a lord." On the other hand, he does not disdain the little French parties which the Marquis of Steyne gave at the Star and Garter, and he is on terms of intimacy with that elderly buck Lord Colchicum.

It is but natural, therefore, that he valued etiquette more highly than polite letters, and that in his view procedure was of greater import than morality. After himself, he worshipped his family, which was but another form of self. "My nephew marry a tragedy queen!" he exclaimed when he heard of Arthur's entanglement. "Gracious mercy, people will laugh at me so that I shall not dare show my head." Wherefore, for his own sake as much as for his nephew's, he declined the invitations of his exalted friends, and reluctantly went to Fairoaks on his errand of discretion. Here he behaved with his wonted

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magnificence. "Why are there no such things as *lettres-de-cachet*," he asked, "and a Bastille for young fellows of family?" And it was in this spirit that he tackled the question of his nephew's brief madness. His mind was made up from the first. "The issue shan't be marriage, my dear sister," said he. "We're not going to have a Pendennis, the head of the house, marry a strolling mountebank from a booth." And he handled the affair with a fine tact; he went so far, for the sake of the house, as to laugh at the pretensions of his own nephew; and he treated Costigan with a mixed contempt and cajolery which did credit to the world in which he lived. Nor could Thackeray have found better foils for the Major's worldliness than his sister's mild indulgence and the swaggering blackguardism of Captain Costigan; and it is no wonder that the Major came off from the encounter with flying colours.

Henceforth he plays Mentor to Arthur's Telemachus. As I have said, he is the Vautrin of the drama; but his philosophy (it may be repeated) is neither so daring nor so romantic as the Frenchman's. The world which he would have his nephew conquer is merely the world of his own narrow acquaintance, where a knowledge of fashionable families is far more important than courage. "My dear boy," says he, "you cannot begin your genealogical studies too early; I wish to Heaven you would read in Debrett every day." The prospect which he holds out to his nephew is comfortable, if commonplace—a rich marriage, Parliament, distinction. "Remember," he ob-

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serves with the genuine accent of sound counsel,—"remember, it's as easy to marry a rich woman as a poor woman: and a devilish deal pleasanter to sit down to a good dinner than to a scrag of mutton in lodgings. Make up your mind to that. A woman with a jointure is a doosid deal easier a profession than the law, let me tell you. Look out; *I* shall be on the watch for you, and I shall die content, my boy, if I can see you with a good lady-like wife, and a good carriage and a good pair of horses, living in society, and seeing your friends, like a gentleman." That is an ideal of life, like another, and perhaps, making an allowance for nationality, it is not very different from Vautrin's own. Nor in this is there any hint of insincerity. The ideal which the Major holds up to others is ever before his own eyes. "I am an old soldier, begad," he pleasantly remarks as he rides in Sir Hugh Trumpington's brougham, "and I learned in early life to make myself comfortable."

For him, in truth, society was a profession as well as a cult. He studied his acquaintances, as other men study law or theology. When the Duke gave the Major a finger of a pipe-clayed glove to shake, the Major was in high good-humour. "Yes, depend upon it, my boy," thus he moralised; "for a poor man there is nothing like having good acquaintances. Who were those men with whom you saw me in the bow-window at Bays's? Two were peers of the realm. Hobanob *will* be a peer as soon as his grand-uncle dies, and he has had his third seizure; and of the other four, not one has less than his seven thou-

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sand a-year. . . . That is the benefit of knowing rich men; I dine for nothing, sir; I go into the country, and I'm mounted for nothing. Other fellows keep hounds and gamekeepers for me. *Sic vos non vobis*, as we used to say at Grey Friars, hey? I'm of the opinion of my old friend Leech, of the Forty-Fourth; and a devilish shrewd fellow he was, as most Scotchmen are. Gad, sir, Leech used to say he was so poor that he couldn't afford to know a poor man."

And so the Major went through life, neither toiling nor spinning, arrayed in all the magnificence which the best of tailors and an irreproachable valet could compass. A touch of birth or fashion made the whole world kin for him. When his nephew lived in chambers with Warrington, he was easily consoled with the thought, "Suffolk Warringtons! I shouldn't wonder, a good family," and he was even reconciled to Pen's attack upon literature, remembering that nowadays clever fellows got into the very best houses. Even his ignorances were such as become a gentleman. When Pendennis told him he was plucked, "I wonder you can look me in the face after such a disgrace, sir," thunders the Major, "I wonder you submitted to it as a gentleman," and asked in amaze whether it was done in public. Yet for all that he is a gentleman always, a gentleman kindly and shrewd, whose worldly wisdom is at once genial and dignified. Thackeray, moreover, drew his portrait with evident sympathy. Once, it is true, he lectured him after his wont. "Is this jaded and selfish worldling," he asks,

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"the lad who, a short while back, was ready to fling away his worldly all, his hope, his ambition, his chance of life for his love? This is the man you are proud of, old Pendennis." But old Pendennis escaped with less scolding than most, and Thackeray did not hide his predilection. "My vanity," he told Mrs. Brookfield, "would be to go through life as a gentleman, as a Major Pendennis," and in this half-humorous confession Thackeray was perhaps nearer the truth than he thought.

Like master, like man, and the Major is admirably matched in Morgan, the valet. Had that worthy done nothing else than describe the Temple as "rather a shy place," he would not have been created in vain. But below-stairs, or at the "Wheel of Fortune," he is as great an aristocrat as his master in another sphere. Not only does he follow his master into "the best houses"; he has both made money and surprised secrets. However, when he attempts blackmail, he is no match for the Major, and he is speedily forced to an abject surrender in a scene which is among the best in the book. In his other descent below-stairs, Thackeray is not so happy. Alcide Mirobalant is on the one hand a concession to fashion, on the other he is monstrously overdrawn. At the time when *Pendennis* was written the world had long been curious about cooks. Louis Eustache Ude had won a place among the Fraserians, and though many experts ridiculed the talent of this eminent sentimentalist, he nevertheless symbolised a prevailing taste. In other words, gastronomy was the mode;

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man was defined as a "dining animal," and the common-places of Brillat-Savarin were deftly served up by novelist and critic. Lord Lytton had already panegyrised the cook—qu'un cuisinier est un mortel divin!—in a famous chapter of *Pelham*. In his most approved style he had exclaimed, "By Lucullus, what a visionary béchamelle!" He had pronounced Guloseton's chickens "worthy the honour of being dressed." He had even compared the lusty lusciousness of a pear to the style of the old English poets.

But concerning cookery, as concerning many other arts of life, the *locus classicus* is to be found in the works of Disraeli. It is in *Tancred* that the artistry of the cook is most wittily expressed, without the bombast of Lytton or the caricature of Thackeray. Leander and the Papa Prevost are drawn with the proper touch and in the true colours. Being artists, they are conscious of their high destiny, and it is not surprising that they wither without appreciation. Leander at Montacute Castle, with no message from the Duke, is like a poet whose verses are unread and unsung. "How can he compose," asks Prevost, "when he is not appreciated?" That is the proper spirit of the mock heroic; that is the quiet solemnity, which gives to irony its sharpest, surest point; and Thackeray, in following the fashion, fell below the excellence of his model.

For it was in frank competition with Leander that Monsieur Alcide Mirobalant, "chef of the bouche of Sir Clavering, Baronet," was drawn. And he is not a success, because all his traits are exaggerated.

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He does not resemble a cook so much as the comic Frenchman of convention. His costume is as fantastic as himself, and is designed to excite laughter rather than to convince you of his reality. You believe as little in the man himself as in his light green frock, his crimson velvet waistcoat, his *pantalon écossais*, and the other appurtenances of his holiday attire. His declaration of passion to the adorable Blanche, made by means of the *plats* which she loved best, is amusing enough, but it is a piece of frank burlesque, suddenly introduced into a piece of realism. Equally ludicrous is Mirobalant's encounter with Pendennis at the Baymouth ball, and the absurdity is heightened by the apology which Laura forces Pendennis to make, and which proves that the episode is taken seriously. In brief, Mirobalant is out of tone, but he may be accepted as an interlude of farce, as a specimen of that "comic relief," which our playwrights believe to be the essence of drama.

But while Mirobalant fails, the Blanche of his adoration is a little triumph of portraiture. She is as pert a jade as ever deceived in life, or masqueraded in fiction. The Chevalier Strong, whose hatred of her is unconcealed, describes her best. "Miss Amory," says he, "is a muse—Miss Amory is a mystery—Miss Amory is a *femme incomprise*." And with her little airs and graces, with her little poems, with her fierce and selfish temper, she is exquisitely superficial and malicious. She is of the type about which men flutter, and which women decry and contemn.

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While Laura detects her hypocrisy in an instant, she ensnares Pendennis with the deftest flattery, and only transfers her love to the hapless Foker at the last minute. When the cold, harsh world depreciates her, she takes refuge in the little book bound in blue velvet, with a gilt lock, and on it printed in gold the title of "Mes Larmes." "Mes Larmes!" she murmurs, "isn't it a pretty title." But all is pretty about her, her fair hair with its green reflections, her dark wistful eyes, her little *moues*, and her dainty frocks—all is pretty, indeed, except her devilry and her cunning. No wonder the poor Baronet wishes Missy was dead; no wonder Ned Strong would like to see her deep in a well, for, as Clavering admits, "she turns all the house round in her quiet way, and with her sentimental airs." But when she unmasks her battery she is more than a match in mere worldliness for the Major himself, and it is clear that Thackeray drew her after life and with genuine delight.

Admirable, too, is Mr. Harry Foker, a reflection, it is said, of one Archdeckne, long a familiar figure in the clubs. Now, Foker is a downy cove, who knows the time of day, and is willing to impart his knowledge to his friends. In this peculiar quality of downiness he is superior to the worthy brewer, his father, or to his devoted mother, the exquisite Lady Agnes. Safe from scrapes himself, he is ready with sublime generosity to extricate others. This young buck preaches to Pendennis in a strain which the Major would have approved with all his heart. For

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his part he had done with Oxbridge. "Parley voo's the ticket," says he; "It'ly and that sort of thing." But he doesn't like to leave Pendennis among the Philistines. He urges him to eat dinners, not give them; to ride other men's horses; and to keep clear of gambling. "They'll beat you at it, Pen, my boy, even if they play on the square," he urges; "which I don't say they don't, nor which I don't say they do, mind. But *I* wouldn't play with 'em. You're no match for 'em. You ain't up to their weight. It's like little Black Strap standing up to Tom Spring—the Black's a pretty fighter, but, Law bless you, his arm ain't long enough to touch Tom,—and I tell you, you're going it with fellers beyond your weight." Such is Foker's philosophy, and very sound it is. But this downy young gentleman is always on the spot, whether he is nursing a debauched headache, or driving Miss Pinckney to Richmond, or attending Ben Budgem's night at the Three-cornered Hat, or simpering over Miss Blanche at the piano. He is always on the spot, and Thackeray has drawn him, big cigar, fancy waistcoat, large buttons and all, with the fidelity which comes of intimate acquaintance and perfect understanding.

The rest of the less reputable characters are realised with equal skill—the Costigans, the Claverings, and Strongs. Altamont is monstrous even for his company, but the others are true enough to themselves and their purpose. Costigan is as nearly related to the kings of Ireland as was his ancestor, Barry Lyndon, and he is sketched with the same

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neatness and the same spice of malice which Thackeray generally brings to the portraiture of Irishmen. He was invented, as Thackeray said in a paper entitled *De Finibus*, "as authors invent their personages, out of scraps, heeltaps, odds and ends of characters." But, though he was invented out of scraps, Thackeray knew him so well, and his pride of birth, and his love of brandy and idleness, and his delight in his daughter's talent and marriage, that when he encountered him in real life he recognised him instantly.

"I was smoking in a tavern parlour one night," so the author tells the story in *De Finibus*, "and this Costigan came into the room alive, the very man: the most remarkable resemblance of the printed sketches of the man, of the rude drawings in which I had depicted him. He had the same little coat, the same battered hat, cocked on one eye, the same twinkle in that eye. 'Sir,' said I, knowing him to be an old friend whom I had met in unknown regions—'Sir,' I said, 'may I offer you a glass of brandy-and-water?' '*Bedad, ye may*,' says he, 'and I'll sing ye a song tu.' Of course he spoke with an Irish brogue. Of course he had been in the army. . . . How had I come to know him, to divine him? Nothing shall convince me that I have not seen that man in the world of spirits." It may be left to the mystics to explain the phenomenon. But the resemblance of the man in the tavern to Costigan is a high tribute to Costigan's human similitude. The resemblance explains also the accusation often levelled at Thackeray of drawing

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too nearly after life. The champions of Catherine Hayes took umbrage at a name. Five Irishmen recognised themselves, without warrant, in the Mulligan of *Mrs. Perkins' Ball*, and their anger was but another proof of Thackeray's skill. His characters suggested something which was not mere fiction, something which was alive, and the guilty braggart caught sight of his likeness, as in a mirror, and confessed.

Upon a set of eccentric characters, then, *Pendennis* establishes its claim to immortality. Unhappily the more reputable personages in the drama do not inspire the same admiration as Mr. Foker and the Major. Arthur Pendennis himself, the young Marquis of Fairoaks, is a coxcomb, and not a very fine coxcomb either. He would have been none the worse material for that had Thackeray frankly pictured him a prig as he frankly pictured George Osborne a cad. But Thackeray both displays his own sympathy for Pendennis and demands yours. In the author's eyes Pen is a good-natured, generous young fellow, and so no doubt he is at times. On the other hand, he is—in his hours—a portentous prig. The truth is, he is so many things that he is neither consistent nor intelligible. Though he is a young man about town, his nights, you are given to understand, were "wild," not "wicked." He was "too lofty to stoop to a vulgar intrigue," and "never could speak to one of the sex but with respectful courtesy." His little passage with Fanny Bolton is so ludicrous that one wonders what all the pother is about. And Thackeray's

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lack of courage not only spoils the character of Pendennis, it weakens the motive of the book. You cannot believe him a devil of a fellow, who has so few sins to his account; and the kindest thing to say of him is that he is true, not to human nature, but to the British nature of the early 'Forties.

As to the two ladies, Helen Pendennis and Laura, we prefer to believe that they belong to no age nor clime. In Thackeray's representation they suggest nothing save dulness and insipidity. They are not so much women as bottles of tears, reverberating phonographs of sobs. Their talk is like the sad twittering of sparrows in a wintry garden, or the pit-a-pat of rain upon the window. At the smallest excuse, "the two women rush into each other's embraces," and while the mother is always "fond," Laura is ever "affectionate and pure." Why this young woman of sixteen, brought up in the seclusion of Fairoaks, should be anything else than pure it is difficult to surmise. She was as pure, you are convinced, as the white muslin frock, tied with a blue bow on the shoulder, which she certainly wore. But it was the fashion of the time to insist upon the obvious virtues, which we now take for granted, and Laura or Flora (as the Major called her) is essentially a thing not of life but of fashion.

George Warrington, from the nobility of his character, must be classed with the two poor ladies, though, of course, he is more substantial than they, more closely compact of bone and muscle. He is what is called nowadays a good all-round man, a Bo-

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hemian who is a gentleman, an athlete who is also a scholar. "He had been one of the hardest livers and hardest readers of his time at Oxbridge," says Thackeray, "where the name of Stunning Warrington was yet famous for beating bargemen, pulling matches, winning prizes, and drinking milk-punch." He is one of those heroes to whom nothing comes amiss: he can write, he can box, he can talk. In fact, he is a mixture of Guy Livingstone and the Grub Street hack. The worst is that Thackeray has overdone his love of squalor; he has put him in an atmosphere of tobacco, which is too thick for belief. The gentleman who wipes his wrist across his beard after a draught of ale smacks of the fairy story, and the dilapidation of his chambers is an unnecessary smudge upon the portrait. His carpet is full of holes, you are told, his Plato is battered, his tables are stained with the circles of many pint-pots, he has scarcely "an article of furniture that has not been in the wars." Now, since there is no particular merit in squalor, and since Warrington is drawn as a grave and serious scholar, as well as a gentleman, many of these traits contradict themselves, and he appears less a man than a catalogue of "sterling" qualities. His contempt of ambition, his secret consciousness of a broken life, his candid honesty, his suppression of himself in anonymous journalism, are excellent virtues and well depicted. But a finer subtlety of detail might have made the character at once credible and consistent. As he is, he is not for a moment comparable to the Major, and if, as is said, he is drawn

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from George Stovin Venables, he assuredly does not flatter his model.

But *Pendennis* had another claim, besides its characters, to public recognition; it aroused the public curiosity upon another ground. It presented a picture of the literary world, as Thackeray knew it, which is neither pleasant nor unjustified. Grub Street was never the most amiable quarter of the town, and Thackeray described it with the contempt of one who had strayed within its precincts in his own despite. As has already been said, he was no native of Bohemia, nor was he ever acclimatised to its heavy atmosphere. But he knew it all the better, because he looked upon it with the unprejudiced eye of an outsider. Clearly, then, the experience of Pendennis is in all respects his own, and the chapters in which the foundation of *The Pall Mall Gazette* is set forth are intimately autobiographical. Pendennis, in fact, entered the world of letters by the same gate as Thackeray, and for the same reasons. He, too, wished to fill a depleted purse; he, too, had a natural gift, which could easily be turned into current coin of the realm; and when Arthur modestly tells Warrington that "he cannot fly on his wing," Warrington replies in words which accurately describe Thackeray himself, "But you can on your own, my boy, which is lighter and soars higher, perhaps." Poor Pen, delighted at the praise, thinks of his "Ariadne in Naxos," and Warrington instantly brings him down to earth with a burst of laughter. He tells him it is useless for him, an absurd little tomtit, to set up for a

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Pindar, but he candidly allows that "he can write a magazine article, and turn out a pretty copy of verses."

In other words, Pen has the same talent which distinguished his author when he joined the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*. And Pendennis rushes into Grub Street with the delightful enthusiasm of inexperience which the author of his being knew so intimately. In a few pages the romance of the literary calling is artfully displayed. In Pen's eyes all is poetry and delight. What a career, to emulate "the sense, the satire, the scholarship" of his friend Warrington! Shandon, again, is a man of genius, infamously compelled by the avarice of the publishers to languish in the Fleet. The knights of the pen are chivalrous, brilliant, and honest, every one of them. Pen carries his manuscripts to the office "with a great deal of bustle and pleasure; such as a man feels at the outset of his literary career, when to see himself in print is still a novel sensation." His first set of verses are "screwed out" with the pleasure and excitement which are the privilege of youth. When the first parcel of books come for review from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, he "had never been so delighted in his life: his hand trembled as he cut the string of the packet, and beheld within a smart set of new neat calico-bound books—travels, and novels, and poems." It is all fresh as sunshine, no shadow of drudgery lies across his path as Pendennis, having sported his oak, sits down to read and to review.

Moreover, the Press was not yet common enough

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to have lost its mystery. Optimists still believed in its mission and influence. Even Warrington, the soft-hearted cynic, was amazed at the trade which he followed. "Look at that, Pen," he said, as they passed a newspaper office in the Strand. "There she is—the great engine—she never sleeps. She has her ambassadors in every quarter of the world—her couriers upon every road. Her officers march along with armies, and her envoys walk into statesmen's cabinets. They are ubiquitous? Yonder journal has an agent, at this minute, giving bribes at Madrid; and another inspecting the price of potatoes in Covent Garden. Look! here comes the Foreign Express galloping in. They will be able to give news to Downing Street to-morrow: funds will rise or fall, fortunes be made or lost; Lord B. will get up, and, holding the paper in his hand, and seeing the noble Marquis in his place, will make a great speech; and—Mr. Doolan will be called away from his supper at the Back Kitchen; for he is foreign sub-editor, and sees the mail on the newspaper sheet before he goes to his own."

Thus with perfect candour Thackeray said what might be said in praise of the world of letters. While in Pendennis he pictured in vivid colours the enthusiasm of his youth, he made Warrington the mouthpiece of his maturer opinion and harsher criticism. The literary medal had, and has always had, a reverse, and Thackeray did not hesitate to show it. His Paternoster Row is given over to sordid rivalries and eager toadyism. His Bungays and Bacons are as ignorant as they are avaricious; and Captain Shandon

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is not a dignified example of literary genius. The famous scene in the Fleet Prison, wherein the Captain reads the prospectus of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, is a piece of satire which Thackeray did not often surpass. It was to the gentlemen of England that the imprisoned Captain made his appeal. He observed from the secure retreat of the Fleet Prison that "the good institutions, which had made our country glorious, and the name of English Gentleman the proudest in the world, were left without defence." He referred in moving words to the plain of Waterloo, and on remarking how his venerable friend Bungay was affected, declared that he had used the Duke and the battle of Waterloo a hundred times—and "never knew the Duke to fail." From friends the Captain turned lightly to foes, dismissed in a sentence certain "hireling advocates," and declared that they must not "have Grub Street publishing Gazettes from Whitehall." Whereupon Bungay wagged his dull head and says, "For a slashing article, there's nobody like the Capting—no-obody like him." So with a flourish the Captain addressed himself "to the higher circles of Society: we care not to disown it—*The Pall Mall Gazette* is written by gentlemen for gentlemen; its conductors speak to the classes in which they live and were born." And Bungay awoke from a second snooze, which held him as securely as sleep held Jonathan Wild at the ministrations of the prison chaplain.

Still more bitter is the satire of Bungay's dinner-party, whose table-talk sounds like a travesty of

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Swift's "Polite Conversation." The entertainment is as vulgar and fatuous as possible. Thackeray spares nothing and nobody. Miss Bunion's vast appetite, Mr. Wagg's bad puns, Wenham's snobbery, the Captain's drunkenness, Percy Popjoy's ambition to be taken for a literary man, Captain Sumph's[1] silly stories of Byron—are all ridiculed without stint or pity. The conversation never sparkles for an instant. It is silly and sordid from soup to dessert, and none of those who "cut mutton" with Bungay proves worth his salt. The satire is legitimate, but Thackeray's comment is hardly just. "Not one word about literature," says he, "had been said during the whole course of the night." And why, indeed, should this word have been spoken? Not only is the objection unnecessary; it weakens Thackeray's argument, since there is no more reason why men of letters should discuss literature with one another than why lawyers should dispute of law, or parsons of theology. The literary world is indicted in *Pendennis* for taking itself and its craft too seriously, for claiming exemption from the duties imposed by honest citizenship. Yet when once it declares itself indifferent to its calling, Thackeray is ready with a reproach.

But Thackeray did not frame his indictment against journalists and publishers without warrant. He described Grub Street, as he knew it, with scrupulous

[1] It is scarcely worth while to trace all Bungay's guests to their origins, but Sumph was doubtless suggested by Captain Medwin, of the 24th Light Dragoons, who published (in 1824) a set of foolish *Conversations with Lord Byron.*

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accuracy. And it was not a very pleasant place. A strange mixture of sentimentality and recrimination, it inclined on the one side to insipidity, on the other to violence. There was room within its borders both for Bludyer and Popjoy: indeed it may be said that Popjoy was Bludyer's best excuse. But such as they were, Thackeray understood them, and their fellows, intimately, and, since he had spent his life among them, this knowledge is not surprising. He had edited papers; he had contributed to them from at home and abroad; he had done the work of a special correspondent; he had for many years cut a figure in the magazines, and in *Pendennis* he resumes his experience. Not a few of his characters are drawn direct from life. Bungay, for instance, is an unamiable portrait of Colborn the publisher, while Archer, the quidnunc, whose advice is always wanted at the Palace, and whose taste for cold beef the Duke himself consults, is none other than Tom Hill of *The Monthly Mirror*, whom Theodore Hook painted as Hull in *Gilbert Gurney*.

But by far the most famous portrait in the gallery is Captain Shandon, for which sat Maginn, the "bright broken" Irishman. It is not unkind, this portrait, for the Captain is as gentle a ruffian as ever wrote a slashing article or spent his last shilling on a drink. There are many touches, too, which heighten the verisimilitude, and make the intention certain. The Doctor's knowledge of the Fleet was as intimate as the Captain's, and the prospectus of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, pompously composed within the walls of a

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prison, reminds us of *The Tobias Correspondence*, wherein Maginn, from the security of a garret in Wych Street, set forth "the whole art and mystery of writing a paper." Nevertheless, the portrait does not do perfect justice to the Doctor. For Maginn, when his shillelah was laid aside, was a real man of letters, and a finished scholar to boot. There was, of course, something lacking in his character; and his ambition, if indeed he knew the meaning of the word, never kept pace with his attainments. For some years he concealed his name, even from Blackwood; and when he descended into the pit of London journalism he speedily won a reputation for what was worst in him. The savage mangler of Grantley Berkeley, for instance, captured a fame which was long withheld from the scholar who turned *Chevy Chase* into Latin, and Homer into the metre of a border ballad.

The truth is, facility and an inborn love of fighting destroyed him. He could turn his hand so easily to anything, prose or verse, Latin or English, that he never did justice to his own talent. He once told Blackwood that there was no chance of "his turning author of anything beyond a spelling-book," and though now and again he wrote a book for money, with characteristic prodigality he left the best of his work buried in *Fraser's Magazine*, where his essays on Shakespeare and Rabelais and his brilliant versions of Lucian remain to attest his sound judgment and his happy hand. Nor should it be forgotten that so fastidious a critic as Matthew Arnold praised his

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Homeric ballads, and that Lockhart loved and served him to the end. Unfortunately, his vices always eclipsed his virtues in the popular eye; his reckless character soon got the better of his conspicuous talent; and when his collapse was complete, he sacrificed principle for a pittance, and would write for one side as easily as for the other. But such as he was, he belonged to his time, and Thackeray found a full warrant as well in his gifts as in his misfortunes for the portrait of Captain Shandon.

However, no sooner were those chapters of *Pendennis* published which describe the literary world, than the Press made a characteristic outcry against Thackeray. The author was accused by *The Chronicle* of "fostering a baneful prejudice against literary men." *The Examiner*, with miraculous insight, detected not merely the sin, but its motive. It charged Thackeray with "condescending to caricature (as is too often his habit) his literary fellow-labourers, in order to pay court to the non-literary class."[1] Now, such criticism as this is manifestly absurd. As Thackeray himself said in reply, "If every character in a story is to represent a class, not an individual, novels would become impossible." This reply is un-

[1] Yet Thackeray was born a man of letters, and he was conscious of his birthright. "The first literary man I ever met was Croly," he told Elwin. "I was a lad of seventeen, on the top of a coach, going to Cambridge. Somebody pointed Croly out to me. I had read *Salathiel* at sixteen, and thought it divine. I turned back and gazed at him. The person who pointed him out to me, said, 'I see that lad is fated.' He knew it by the way I gazed after a literary man."

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answerable and sufficient, and Thackeray, who was accused again and again of attacking a profession or a nation through an individual, made use of it many times.

But in answer to *The Chronicle* and *Examiner* he was not content with the obvious refutation. He set forth with energy and eloquence his views upon the dignity of literature. It was a subject upon which he always wrote with wisdom and conviction, and all men of letters owe him a debt of gratitude. He looked upon his profession without cant or humbug; he claimed for it neither favour nor privilege. "Men of letters," said he, "had best silently assume that they are as good as any other gentlemen." He denied that the "non-literary class" delighted in the degradation of authors, who, on the contrary, won by their pen friends, sympathy, applause. He declares, with perfect truth, that no man loses his social rank, whatever it may be, by the practice of letters. With equal truth he points out that many a man claims a place in the world by his writings, which he did not inherit, and which his writings alone could give him.

But, in return, he insists that a man of letters should not be excused by his talent from performing the common duties of citizenship. In other words, he confesses a "prejudice against running into debt and drunkenness and disorderly life." Nowadays, when literature has entered upon a career of extreme respectability, this prejudice is unnecessary. But in the days of Bludyer and the Captain no one who respected his craft could do less than impose upon his

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fellow-craftsmen the obligations of order and honesty. Moreover, Thackeray was not unduly censorious in his judgment of his colleagues. While he would have them preserve a high standard of life, he would not condemn them too hardly if they failed. His sympathy with Shandon is clearly expressed, and he was no less kind to the model who sat for Shandon's portrait. "I have carried money," said he, "and from a noble brother man-of-letters, to some one not unlike Shandon in prison, and have watched the beautiful devotion of his wife in that place." But he was never of those who believed that a servile imitation of Shelley's or Byron's supposed vices was the short cut to genius, and the simple, honest views which he held he set forth with honest simplicity.

Nor, for the rest, would he cherish any illusions concerning his craft. He puts the strongest case against the professors of literature in the mouth of Warrington, and that sturdy hack does not spare the defendants. "A good deal of undeserved compassion has been thrown away upon what is called a bookseller's drudge," says Warrington; and when Pen in the inexperienced enthusiasm of youth protests against the cynicism bred of solitary pipes and ale, "a fiddlestick about men of genius," cries Warrington,—"I deny that there are so many geniuses as people who whimper about the fate of men of letters assert they are." And in his own person Thackeray supports Warrington's view. In a review of Lytton's *Memoir of Laman Blanchard*, he declines to pity what he deems a fortunate career. He recognises that Blanch-

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ard followed the profession he loved best, and found his delight not only in the scanty reward of his work, but in the mere practice of literature. This attitude is surely more reasonable than Lytton's posture of sorrow and regret. After all, Blanchard's talent was slender enough, and doubtless he put it to the best possible use in the literature of the day.

Indeed, Thackeray's main argument that the man of letters must obey the general law of life and conduct is irrefragable, and it is only when he would apply the tenets of the Manchester school to literature that you disagree with him. Literature is not a mere matter of supply and demand. Some men, at any rate, write because they have something to say, and are undeterred by lack of appreciation. Thackeray himself did not renounce his craft because he failed to find readers. For ten years he wrote assiduously for the magazines, often without success. *Barry Lyndon* was a sad failure when it appeared in the pages of *Regina*, and *Vanity Fair* itself was within an ace of being suppressed at the fifth number for lack of subscribers. But Thackeray neither hesitated nor despaired. He knew in his heart that what he "supplied" was superior to the popular "demand"; he knew also that reputation was far better than what he afterwards called it, "the cant of our trade"; and loyally he worked to win it. And his work was not thrown away, for reputation, conferred by fellow-craftsmen, is the assurance of self-respect, to sacrifice which is the peculiar sin of literature.

Nevertheless, if Thackeray erred at all in the judg-

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ment of his profession, he erred upon the right side. That which he wrote seems less than half true to-day, because the conditions of literary life are changed. Men of letters long ago deserted Bohemia to live upon the outskirts of Belgravia or within the sacred precincts of Tyburnia. They no longer address an audience of gentlemen from the Fleet, nor do they write masterpieces while hiding from their creditors. They pay their tailors, and they refrain from drink, and so far they conform to the standard which Thackeray set up for them. But with their prosperity they have developed new vices, which no Thackeray has arisen to castigate. They are pompous; they take themselves and their profession all too gravely; and, worse still, they hunger and thirst after notoriety. It is not legitimate reputation which keeps them awake —that is no longer the cant of their trade. They are sleeplessly eager for the advertisement not of their works, but of themselves. They are unhappy when they are taken for mere men, like lawyers or stockbrokers. They would, if they could, go through life with the stamp of their art upon them. It is hard to say which Thackeray would have preferred, his own age or ours. But it is certain that the chapters devoted to the literary profession claimed an audience for *Pendennis* which would have been obstinately indifferent to its easy unaffected style, its pictures of contemporary manners, and its half-a-dozen vividly drawn characters. Perhaps the author's own comment upon the book is the fairest. "I lit upon a very stupid part, I'm sorry to say," he wrote to Mrs.

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Brookfield, after reading some back numbers of *Pendennis*, "and yet how well written it is! What a shame the author don't write a complete good book!" A shame, indeed, which presently the author did his best to remove.

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CHAPTER VI

LECTURES AND LECTURING. *ESMOND*

In 1850, when the last number of *Pendennis* was given to the world, Thackeray's reputation was firmly assured. He was, in fact, the one rival near the throne of Dickens, and the zealous readers of the day enrolled themselves under one banner or the other, according to temperament. A year later, election to the Athenæum Club set a seal upon his fame, and it should be remembered to Croker's credit that Thackeray, as has been said, owed this honour in some measure to the advocacy of Mr. Wenham. But in those days fame was not easily convertible into money, and men of letters were not apt to make a fortune with a single book. To enrich his family, therefore, Thackeray resolved upon a course of lectures. Within four years he travelled from end to end of England, and paid two visits to America. It was a task which was always irksome to him, yet he performed it with excellent taste and tact; and, after the first display at Willis's Rooms, success was assured. He never concealed the fatigue which the long journeys and the oft-recurring lectures inflicted upon him. He went to America, he wrote to his daughter, "not because I like it, but because it is right that I should secure some money against my

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death for your poor mother and you two girls." Again, on his second visit across the Atlantic, "Oh, how weary, weary I am of this lecturing," he complained.

But once having taken the resolution, he did his utmost to fit himself for the task. A month before the first lecture, he tried the great room at Willis's, and, as he told Mrs. Brookfield—"recited part of the multiplication-table to a waiter at the opposite end, so as to try my voice. He said he could hear perfectly, and I dare say he could, but the thoughts somehow swell and amplify with that high-pitched voice and elaborate distinctness." And instantly Thackeray discerns, after his wont, how "orators become humbugs"; nevertheless, he found this "dip into a life new to him" interesting, and he acquired to perfection what Motley called a "light-in-hand manner." His first lecture, given on May 22, 1851, has been described by many an appreciative pen. "It was given at Willis's Rooms," wrote Charlotte Brontë, "where the Almack's balls are held—a great painted and gilded saloon, with long sofas for benches. The audience was said to be the cream of London society, and it looked so. I did not at all expect that the great lecturer would know me or notice me under these circumstances, with admiring duchesses and countesses seated in rows before him; but he met me as I entered, shook hands, took me to his mother, whom I had not before seen, and introduced me."

But Charlotte Brontë could not help seeing that

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her idol had feet of clay, and presently she set forth her view in more critical terms. "I could not always coincide with the sentiments expressed," she wrote, "or the opinions broached; but I admired the gentlemanlike ease, the quiet humour, the taste, the talent, and the originality of the lecturer." It is impossible to recover the tone of a lecturer, or to echo the accent of a dead actor. When the voice is still, we can only place a humiliating reliance on press notices, and these agree so far as to give a vague impression of Thackeray's manner. In speaking, as in writing, he esteemed ease above eloquence. As in his books he shunned rhetoric, so in his lectures he avoided elaboration.[1] He regarded his audience as friends with whom he was conversing, rather than as strangers before whom he was making a display, and he easily achieved the success at which he aimed.

The matter of his lectures was no less character-

[1] An article published in *The New York Evening Post*, and printed in *The Letters of W. M. Thackeray*, sums up in flattering terms the general opinion. "His elocution," says *The Post*, "surprised those who had derived their impressions from the English journals. His voice is a superb tenor, and possesses that pathetic tremble which is so effective, in what is called emotive eloquence, while his delivery was as well suited to the communication he had to make as could well have been imagined. His enunciation is perfect. Every word he uttered might have been heard in the remotest quarters of the room, yet he scarcely lifted his voice above a colloquial tone. The most striking feature in his whole manner was the utter absence of affectation of any kind."

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istic than their manner. In choosing *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*[1] as the subject of his first course, he did but follow the natural bent of his mind. Had he been a man of leisure he would, he says, have devoted himself to the study of the past, and for some years he was resolved to compose a serious history of Queen Anne and her Court. For such a task he had many qualifications. He possessed the imaginative faculty of living in another age than his own; he could see with a quick artistic eye the trappings of dead and gone periods. Despite his love of progress and modern ideas, he submitted easily to the dictates of fancy, and could understand the outward life of any age to which his desultory reading carried him. When he was writing his lectures on the Humourists, he declared that the eighteenth century absorbed him to the exclusion of the nineteenth. But while he had the imagination, without which history cannot be written, he lacked the no less indispensable faculty of criticism. He refused to recognise the tyranny of facts. Such men as he encountered in the past must conform not with the truth of their careers but with his vision of them. In other words, the novelist always got the better of the historian. His Swift, Pope, and Sterne correspond loosely with their originals. They are the creatures of fiction, coloured by prejudice, and transformed by fancy.

[1] *The Humourists*, first delivered in 1851, were published in the shape of a book two years later.

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The truth is that Thackeray, in his historical essays, considered the facts last of all. He began with a purely personal view, to which words and deeds were alike subservient. Thus in his intense conviction he forgot that the humourists of the eighteenth century were men like himself, whose qualities should not elude a vigilant research. In his eyes they were so many Esmonds or Warringtons, who, so long as they did no violence to their century, might aptly illustrate the lecturer's cynicism or embellish his sentimentality. That he did not esteem resemblance essential to a biographical portrait is evident on every page of his Lectures. But, that there might be no doubt, he explains in a letter addressed to M. Forgues "the history of Addison." Now, M. Forgues had declared in a French paper, without the slightest shadow of justice, that Thackeray had praised Addison "to curry favour with the English aristocracy." Thackeray naturally resented so grotesque a calumny, and in self-defence he laid bare the genesis of Addison's character. He confessed that he had no personal liking for the man. But he admired his humour, and more than his humour he admired his conduct of life. "Rich or poor," says he, "he was an upright, honest, dignified gentleman;" and he praised him "as one of our profession," to silence "the absurd outcry about neglected men of genius." This absurd outcry Thackeray had done his best to silence elsewhere, and he might have looked at Addison with no other object than faithfully to paint his character. But that would

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have been alien to his method, and he was content that Addison, like the rest, should point a moral and illustrate a theory.

His first lecture was devoted to Swift, and if we have a right to demand verisimilitude, the Dean's portrait is by far the worst in the gallery. The picture devised by Thackeray's imagination was vile, and traits were ingeniously sought to justify it. The motive which shaped his Addison we know; he does not reveal the motive of his Swift. It is a pity, since this piece of fierce injustice demands an excuse. Not only is the essay packed with inaccuracies; the truth is always twisted to a sinister end. He begins by asking an irrelevant question. "Would we," says he, "have liked to live with him?" With respect, it may be pointed out that our preference has nothing to do with the character and achievements of Swift. But it is indubitably true that the best of Swift's contemporaries did like to live with him, and felt honoured in his acquaintance. For monstrous though he appear to Thackeray, he had the genius of friendship before all his fellows. The great men of the time loved and reverenced him. Addison and Pope, Harley and Bolingbroke, Arbuthnot and Gay were faithful to the end of their lives or his. Bolingbroke was as little sentimental as Swift. While both were giants in intelligence, neither the one nor the other anticipated the Victorian emotion. Yet wrote Bolingbroke in 1729: "I loved you almost twenty years ago." And in the same year the same statesman addresses his friend in a strain of singular

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eloquence. "While my mind," says he, "grows daily more independent of the world, and feels less need of leaning on external objects, the ideas of friendship return oftener: they busy me, they warm me more. Is it that we grow more tender as the moment of our great separation approaches? Or is it that they who are to live together in another state (for *vera amicitia non nisi inter bonos*) begin to feel strongly that divine sympathy which is to be the great band of their future society?" Would Bolingbroke have written so fine a sentence to one who was nothing but scorn, bitterness, rage, and obscenity? No: *vera amicitia non nisi inter bonos*, and *inter bonos* both Bolingbroke and Swift take a lofty place.

So, too, the good Arbuthnot cherished the friendship of Swift. "I can assure you," he wrote to the Dean a few months before his death,—"I can assure you, with great truth, that none of your friends or acquaintance has a more warm heart towards you than myself. I am going out of this troublesome world; and you among the rest of my friends shall have my last prayers and good wishes." So, too, Pope, from whom, says Thackeray without warrant, Swift "slunk away," remained unto the end Swift's friend and admirer. But such records of friendship mean nothing to Thackeray, who seems to have made up his mind about Swift before he wrote his biography. He is quite sure, in defiance of facts, that Swift's companionship and conversation were without charm. He toadied his superiors, we are told, this man who never stooped to flatter; he bul-

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lied and insulted his inferiors; he quailed before you if you met him like a man, and then "watched for you in a sewer, and came out to assail you with a coward's blow and a dirty bludgeon."

It need scarce be said that for these libels Thackeray quotes no authority; there is not an episode in Swift's career to justify one of them; and the inapposite use of the word "sewer" is sufficient proof of prejudice. Even when Thackeray does admit Swift's kindness or devotion, he at the same time suggests that the virtue is prompted by baseness. He insulted a man as he served him, says the biographer, and flung his benefactions into poor men's faces. Did Pope harbour this unkind thought when Swift collected a thousand guineas for him? or young Harrison, whom he befriended? Was this the view of the fifty friends, for whom, while he failed to advance himself, he found preferment? Did Parnell, or Gay, or Congreve, or Rowe, all of whom owed places to him, look upon their benefactor with this acrimony? Was it in this spirit that the Irish people remembered its champion? Assuredly not. In truth, no man of his time received the simple worship which Ireland laid at the feet of Swift. When he returned to Dublin from London in 1726 bonfires were lit, and the church-bells rang out peals of welcome. Once upon a time Walpole was minded to arrest the Dean, and he was asked if he had ten thousand men to spare, for the job could not be done with less. This monster, too, who insulted where he gave, distributed a third of his income, and

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won from his dependents, whom he was said to insult, a frank and lasting affection.

Again, because Swift, who was, in Bolingbroke's phrase, "a hypocrite reversed," did not advertise to his guests his performance of family devotions, Thackeray belabours him with charges of insincerity. But it is clear that in his critic's eye he could do no right. He was guilty of "boisterous servility," though we know as little to whom he was servile as how servility to any man can be boisterous. In the same spirit Thackeray delights to paint his sojourn in Temple's house in the blackest colours, as a time of insult and oppression. Yet he was familiar enough with the period to recognise that the relation of client to patron was honourable and honourably understood. When Swift wrote to Temple for a certificate of morals and learning, he did but employ the conventional terms of his age. Yet this is how a simple action strikes Thackeray: "I don't know anything more melancholy than the letter to Temple, in which, after having broke from his bondage, the poor wretch crouches piteously towards his cage again, and deprecates his master's anger." It is not the poor wretch's letter that is melancholy; it is the biographer's comment.

It is plain, therefore, that Thackeray entertained a kind of personal hatred against Swift. When open charges fail him, he is content with a hinted suggestion of evil. He declares that Vanessa was not merely a woman of taste and spirit, but "a fortune too," as though the man, who indignantly refused the

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money which Harley proffered him, and who never begged a favour for himself, had his eye upon Vanessa's gold. On another page, he blames him for changing sides, yet he should have known that Swift was the most consistent politician of his time. However, it is idle to pursue the critic's inaccuracies, though it may be worth while to attempt an explanation of his acrimony. In the first place, I think, Thackeray disliked Swift, because Swift did not take that genial, worldly view of life, which was suitable to the haunter of clubs and drawing-rooms. The Dean of St. Patrick's was a misanthrope, who loved his friends, and delighted in stealthy benevolence. But he was a misanthrope for all that. A man, who in his own phrase "understood not what was love," and who by ill-health and isolation was driven back upon his own intelligence, he had the leisure to contemplate, and the brain to measure the follies of the human race. In contempt he is Olympian. He gave no quarter, and he expected none. He laid bare human folly, and he has suffered for his courageous indiscretion. But he did not make his attacks upon his fellows from mere savagery. He never put pen to paper save in scorn of stupidity, or with a fixed desire to reform abuses. And the easy-going man about town not unnaturally saddled his back with all the sins and all the absurdities that he castigated in others.

Worse still, Swift was an ironist, and, like all ironists, he has been consistently vilified and misunderstood. Yet surely the author of *Barry Lyndon* should have understood this subtle artifice. But no; like the bit-

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terest Philistine, he imputes to Swift himself all the sins which Swift denounces in others. He follows the familiar critic in applying an infamously false meaning to Swift's *Modest Proposal.* This tract, as all the world might know, was written in a mood of savage despair against the wrongs of Ireland. Outwardly humorous, it is aflame with a passion of sincerity. Every sentence it contains is a cry of hopeless misery, a detestation of suffering which "tore the writer's heart." And Thackeray can say no more than that neither Dick Steele, nor Goldsmith, nor Fielding could have written it. Surely they could not, for the lofty passion which inspires it was not theirs. "Not one of these but melts at the thoughts of childhood, fondles and caresses it," says Thackeray. "Mr. Dean has no such softness, and enters the nursery with the tread and gaiety of an ogre." No, Mr. Dean *has* no such softness, when the starving are to be fed and bitter wrongs clamour for redress. He is not content to "fondle and caress"; he would also feed and succour. True, Thackeray is not quite so foolish as a modern critic, who, having read the passage in which "a very knowing American" declares "that a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food," charges Dean Swift with ignorance or contempt of our American Colonies. But Thackeray's imputation of cannibalism is little less gross, and it proves that, well as he knew the period, he had not chosen to read aright the works of Jonathan Swift.

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What a strange perversion of mind it is, which ascribes to the eager champion of right the very wrongs which he eloquently condemns! Yet in Thackeray's opinion even Gulliver must be taken literally, and judged by the offences in whose dispraise it was written. "As for the humour and conduct of this famous fable," he writes, "I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire; as for the moral, I think it is horrible, shameful, blasphemous; and giant and great as this Dean is, I say we should hoot him." And hoot him he does with the greatest heartiness. Yet I doubt whether "hooting" is the critic's most useful weapon, and I am sure that so highly accomplished an ironist as Thackeray would have been wiser to pierce the mystery of an adept incomparably greater than himself, than to join in the general and foolish "hoot" which for two centuries has been heard in the Dean's dispraise.

I have dwelt at length upon Thackeray's portrait of Swift, because, while it is typical of his method, it presents with sad lucidity the worst vices of that method. What the method was Thackeray clearly explains in a question put to his audience. "In common life," he asks in the lecture on Steele, "don't you often judge and misjudge a man's whole conduct, setting out from a wrong impression?" To this question the lecturer himself could have given but one answer. He misjudged his Humourists continually, viewing them all with an air of sorrowful patronage, as roysterers who fell far short of the standard set up in 1850. This one he reproaches with having sat too

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long at Button's with Mr. Addison; that other displeases him because he has soiled his lace-ruffles with Harry Fielding's claret. He seems to confuse a love of genial company with habitual drunkenness, applying to his victims the process of a cross-examining lawyer. "You were caught revelling last night in a tavern, sir," you can hear him say; "that is how you squander your time, and waste your talents." It is always "Poor Dick Steele," "poor Harry Fielding," and "poor Congreve." Yet these men were not *homunculi* that they should be fitted with nicknames of contempt. They ask no condescension, and deserve no pity. Surely Congreve, who yields in good fortune and accomplishment to none of his contemporaries, was "poor" neither in character nor esteem? And to the libel that "Harry" Fielding was stained with ink and wine, a life of prodigious and productive energy is the best answer. The worst of nicknames is that they easily overpower truth and research. Mr. Lecky[1] complains with perfect justice that Steele has always "received hard measures from modern critics," for which injustice Thackeray is largely to blame. What boots it that "poor Dick" was a keen soldier, an indefatigable writer, an ardent politician? It is far more difficult to discover his good qualities than to recognise the conventional portrait of a "tipsy champion," and so Steele takes his place with the rest in an immemorial tavern.

Even where he approves, Thackeray damps his approval with prejudice. His admiration of Field-

[1] England in the Eighteenth Century, i. 186.

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ing's novels is so frank and generous that you regret the more deeply his inapposite qualification. As he hoots at Swift for the last part of Gulliver, so he thinks "Fielding's evident liking and admiration for Mr. Jones show that the great humourist's moral sense was blunted by his life, and that, here in Art and Ethics, there is a great error." Whereon he proceeds to belabour Mr. Thomas Jones, who, says he, "would not rob a church, but that is all," and to wonder which is the worse enemy to society—Jones or Blifil. By this twisted sentiment he spoils what might and should have been a noble panegyric. In another place he is so thickly befogged by an austere morality as to be unjust even to Pope, the god of his devoutest idolatry. "I wish Addison could have loved Pope better," says he. "The best satire that ever has been penned would never have been written then, and one of the best characters the world ever knew would have been without flaw." It is hard to say which is the stranger perversity—to see Pope's character without a flaw, or to wish the *Dunciad* unwritten. Thackeray hails and salutes the achieving genius; he "does homage to the pen of a hero"; yet he contemplates with regret the hero's crowning achievement, and having painted Swift all black, he paints Pope all white. And thus it is that the didactic spirit always fails to interpret the past. It informs even his favourite Addison with a kind of inhumanity. It is not easy to take an interest in one "who stooped to put himself on a level with most men," who "must have been one of the finest gentlemen the world ever

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saw," and who, as he is drawn by Thackeray, might have sat for his portrait in the gallery of Snobs.

Nevertheless, *The English Humourists* contain many excellent passages not merely of description but of criticism. Though Thackeray rates Sterne soundly for outraging the code of the nineteenth century, he sums up his talent in a phrase which only just misses the truth. "The man is a great jester," says he, "not a great humourist." Again, while he pities Congreve, he has a shrewdly just understanding of his comedy, to which he attributes "a jargon of its own quite unlike life, a sort of moral of its own quite unlike life too." But it is in the painting of manners that his real gift lies. Scattered up and down his lectures there are pages of description, distinguished by an ease and grace which are Thackeray's own. With how light a hand does he sketch the world of *The Spectator* and revivify the London of our ancestors! How deftly he resumes the England which Hogarth saw and drew! Nor does he anywhere prove this faculty more conspicuously than in his *Four Georges*, a curious medley of sermonising and memoirs. While on the one hand each monarch is the text for a moral discourse, the letters and journals of each reign most pleasantly adorn the tale. It is no "drum-and-trumpet" history that he aspires to write. "We are not the Historic Muse," says he, "but her ladyship's attendant, tale-bearer, *valet de chambre*, for whom no man is a hero." So he has much to say of Bath and its visitors, but very little of the American Rebellion; so he describes the life of a

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German Court with excellent humour, while he is silent of campaigns and changing ministries. This view of history is in perfect consonance with his talent, and to their purpose the lectures on the Four Georges are admirably adapted. To-day they excite no controversy; they set forth no original views; but at the time of their delivery their author was absurdly charged with disloyalty, and it is difficult to discern what sentiment it was of national pride or prejudice that he outraged.

The chief merit of the lectures is their style. Composed for the lecture-hall, they appeal to the ear rather than to the eye. The cadence of the prose is nicely devised to claim and to hold the attention. It displays at their best the variety, the ease, the carelessness, which we expect from Thackeray. Seldom rhetorical, and never pompous, the lectures resemble conversation rather than oratory, and quite apart from the opinions of which they are the vehicle they gave an intelligible pleasure to many audiences. It was, indeed, with a keen sense of the theatre that Thackeray sought and found his effects. There is but one —the attack upon Swift—that is monotonous in scope and expression. In the rest grave and gay are cunningly mixed; even the tragedy of George III is pleasantly relieved by a sketch of George Selwyn and his circle. From the point of view of the platform this relief was happily contrived, since the most sympathetic audience cannot easily spend an hour with the same emotion. But when we have done our utmost to imagine the effect which their author's

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voice and gesture gave to them, we cannot but remember that truth is the essence of biography, and that the lectures on the Humourists are the worst blot upon Thackeray's literary reputation.

The lectures were first given in London between May and July, 1851. Three months later Thackeray sailed for America, to find a new world and warm-hearted friends. Wherever he went, north or south, he was enthusiastically received, and no doubt it was the hospitality of the place which deprived us of another *Sketchbook*. The picturesque reporter was always alive in Thackeray, and, one is sure, he was eager to record his impressions. But the spirit of gratitude counselled silence, and though Thackeray's judgment in the matter is sound, we may still regret that the artist did not overcome the man. Nevertheless, the letters addressed to his friends do something to make up the deficiency, and it is easy to recover Thackeray's appreciation of America. Life was as rapid in New York fifty years ago as it is said to be to-day, and Thackeray was speedily caught up in the whirl. "I hardly know what is said," he wrote,—"am thinking of something else, nothing definite, with an irrepressible longing to be in motion." The noise and rattle of the street appall him. "Broadway is miles upon miles long," he tells Mrs. Brookfield, "a rush of life such as I have never seen; not so full as the Strand, but so rapid. The houses are always being torn down and built up again, the railroad cars drive slap into the midst of the city. There are barricades and scaffoldings banging everywhere. . . .

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Nobody is quiet here, no more am I. The rush and restlessness please me, and I like, for a little, the dash of the stream." For every city he has an apt comparison or a shrewd character. Washington reminds him of Wiesbaden—"there are politics and gaieties straggling all over it." Boston he finds like Edinburgh—"a vast amount of Toryism and donnishness everywhere"; while the company of New York is in his eyes the simplest and least pretentious. "It suffices," says he, "that a man should keep a fine house, give parties, and have a daughter, to get all the world to him." But much as he delighted in the keen air, the splendour, and the generosity of the North, he felt himself more intimately at home in the South, where life was as quiet and sluggish as in Kensington. He was happiest at New Orleans, where "the sweet kind French tongue is spoken in the shops." Despite his inborn Radicalism, he professed no horror at slavery. "The negroes don't shock me," he wrote in a letter, "or excite my compassionate feelings at all; they are so grotesque and happy that I can't cry over them." Some years later, in a "Roundabout Paper" called *A Mississippi Bubble*, he bore a willing testimony to the "curious gaiety" of the American negroes. "How they sang," he exclaims; "how they laughed and grinned; how they scraped, bowed, and complimented you and each other." But for domestic purposes slavery seemed to him "the dearest institution that can be devised." He declared that in a Southern city fifteen negroes did "the work which John, the cook, the housemaid,

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and the help do perfectly in your own comfortable London house." Indeed, comfort and happiness made an easy conquest of political prejudice, and he found all the ways of the South excellent. At a tavern in Pontchartrain he had a *bouillabaisse*, worthy of Marseilles, worthy of the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, which he himself celebrated in a ballad, and everywhere flowed Médoc, good, superabundant, and nothing to pay. How then should he, with his sincere love of France, withhold admiration from the Sunny South, still French in its luxury and abandonment? "As for New Orleans, in spring-time," so he rhapsodises,—"just when the orchards were flushing over with peach-blossoms, and the sweet herbs came to flavour the juleps—it seemed to me the city of the world where you can eat and drink the most and suffer the least." So when the war came between the North and South, Thackeray's sympathies followed his heart, and "the abstraction of the two Southern Commissioners from under our flag" inspired half-a-dozen pages of righteous indignation—*On Half a Loaf*—rare in the works of Thackeray. In brief, Thackeray's two journeys to America—he revisited it in 1855 with *The Four Georges*—were disturbed by nothing else than the fatigue and drudgery of lecturing; he brought home with him both fame and money; he had been appreciated by the people and by the press—save by Boston, which found him a snob, and by the Irish, who remembered Catherine Hayes; and he had stored his head, as we shall presently see, with the material of another novel.

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But the lectures did something else than fill Thackeray's pocket. As his *Sketchbook* held the raw material of much admirable fiction, so *The English Humourists* were the wisest possible preparation for the writing of *Esmond*. He did but translate into the form of a novel the material which had already served to amuse the distinguished audiences of Willis's Rooms. Written in 1852, the story was published as its author set sail for America. Indeed, a copy was put into his hands at the very moment of starting. It was the first, and it remained the only, book of which Thackeray wrote the last page before the first was printed. In other words, it was given to the world not in parts but in three complete volumes, and it is not surprising that it is better composed and more closely consistent than any other of his works. Now, *Esmond* is a deliberate attempt to reconstruct the past in word, in fact, in feeling. The scene is laid in the England of Queen Anne, and Thackeray puts his curious knowledge of the period to the best advantage. But he is never dominated by history; as in the Lectures, so in *Esmond*, it is the novelist who always keeps the upper hand. Nor does he indicate his period by any trick of phrase or artifice of diction. His style is no affair of old trappings, made in Wardour Street. You will search his pages in vain for strange words or strangely constructed sentences. It is true that he makes a few concessions to an ancient fashion of spelling: he writes Peterborow, for instance, and Bruxelles; but for the rest he gives a very liberal interpretation to archæology. How,

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then, does he produce the effect of another century? Merely by keeping his style at a higher level than it usually attains. From beginning to end he writes with a restraint which you will vainly seek in *Pendennis*. He has thrown over the story a veil of solemnity, through which his personages appear far away like the distant shapes of another age. The critic who declared that there is no page of *Esmond* but might have been written by a contemporary of Queen Anne was manifestly deceived. Examine the text narrowly, and you will find both words and phrases essentially modern. Indeed, it is the cadence rather than the phrase that is of the eighteenth century, and Thackeray's ear seldom misled him. In other words, the author of *Esmond* has reproduced the effect, not the actual language, of the past, an achievement at once more subtle and convincing than the ransacking of some *Gradus ad Parnassum* for musty names and otiose epithets.

The truth is, Thackeray's knowledge was profound enough to be held in check. He had not crammed the period up in a night to answer a popular demand. There was no need for him to cloak a too obvious ignorance with a parade of hastily acquired knowledge. He did not attain local colour, after the fashion of to-day, by admitting nothing into his novel that was not obsolete. The heroes of modern romance do not live in a real world; they are ticketed in a museum of antiquity; they make love beneath trees whose branches are haunted by stuffed birds; the very words they use belong not to human speech, but to a time-

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worn phrase-book. But Thackeray's method, far happier than that of his successors, was also an indirect reproof to those of his contemporaries who pursued the art of historical fiction. He swept away at a stroke all the conventions of G. P. R. James and his school, of Bulwer and Harrison Ainsworth. In *Esmond* you will find none of the catch-phrases, once so popular. He does not tell you that "as dawn was breaking a solitary horseman might be seen" and the rest of it. The best of his characters are real men and women, although they belong to the past, and it might be said that the shining merit of *Esmond* was its naturalness. At the same time, while Thackeray is not enslaved by archæology, he makes the period clear by a thousand light and incidental touches. When Esmond writes his verses to Gloriana, "Have you never read them?" he asks. "They were thought pretty poems, and attributed by some to Mr. Prior." And so, while he scrupulously avoids pompous description and fine writing, he creates an atmosphere at once consistent and just.

When, in *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray chose a great historical setting for his characters, he made no attempt to introduce Napoleon or Wellington upon the mimic scene. He allowed his readers to hear no more than the echo of the guns which swept the plain of Waterloo. In *Esmond* he was less wisely counselled, and though the temptation to let Steele, Addison, and the others speak for themselves was strong, the novel would have been all the better had he resisted it. He had sketched these personages, for good

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or evil, in his Lectures, and there he might have left them to the judgment of posterity. But he must needs ask them to play their part in the drama of *Esmond;* and it may be said that his characters are never further from reality than when they bear real names.

Now, if a novelist admits famous men into his romance, he lays upon himself a double burden. For the famous men must not only be picturesque and consistent with the creatures of the writer's imagination—they must also be consistent with their own history. That is to say, the author's fancy is, or should be, hampered by truth, and the difficulty of the problem is seen by the rarity of its solution. The invention of imaginary characters carries with it no such responsibility: to attempt an artistic presentation of historical facts is doubly dangerous, because not only does it control the author's imagination, but it admits the reader into the workshop. The material being known, the treatment of it can be more narrowly scrutinised; and *dramatis personæ* bearing the names of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison challenge a criticism which Tom Smith and John Brown escape. Thackeray, being a man of letters, has succeeded in a difficult task far better than the most of his rivals. The heroes whom he borrows from real life are never ridiculous. Though they often speak with a voice which is not their own, their accent is not inhuman, and even if you forget their names, you might still deem them men. Nevertheless the author is not at his ease with them. They neither move nor speak with the naturalness which distinguishes Es-

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mond and Castlewood, and whenever they appear they enwrap the story in another atmosphere.

The positive errors may be passed over lightly. It is superfluous, for instance, to ask why Thackeray should have dressed up Prue Steele in the garb of Mrs. Malaprop, or why he should insist that Roger Sterne was an Irishman. Nor need we do more than refer to the repeated and monstrous outrage upon Jonathan Swift.[1] Let us take Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, who are drawn with the deepest sympathy and the greatest elaboration. They are both a trifle bibulous. Dick the Scholar always "imparts a strong perfume of burnt sack along with his caress," and Addison drinks too deeply of my Lord Halifax's burgundy. Again, they both speak like books. Steele quotes copiously from his own *Tatlers*,[2] and Addison cannot keep off the subject of his own poems. And since men of letters have a life and character apart from their printed works, this restriction indicates a certain timidity in Thackeray's treatment. For the rest, they are both amiable fellows,

[1] Doctor Swift is represented in *Esmond* as morose in temper and violent in manners. He is also, for this occasion, a wanton frightener of children, so that he recalls more closely than ever the Marquis of Steyne, who, it will be remembered, terrified Becky's boy when he met him on the stairs.

[2] Steele tells Esmond that he "drummed at his father's coffin," and he tells the same tale in *The Tatler*, No. 181: "I remember I went into the room where his body lay, and my mother sat weeping alone by it. I had my battledore in my hand, and fell a-beating the coffin, and calling Papa; for, I know not how, I had some slight idea he was locked up there."

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even though they do some violence to their own characters. They are bound together by that tie of schoolboy loyalty which united Lamb and Coleridge, and which Thackeray illustrated again and again. Steele is a pleasant trifler, even when sober; Addison is not guiltless of pomposity even in his cups. The scene wherein Esmond visited Addison at his lodging, pictured the famous battle, and "drew the river on the table *aliquo mero*," is admirably managed; but the dinner of the wits is as forced as Mr. Bungay's party, and *Esmond* is never at its best when these miracles of wit and learning are on the stage. However, Thackeray himself realised their subordination; he knew that they were merely incidental to the action—mere painted trappings in the background; and he makes it clear that his essential interest is in his own characters. Had he suppressed all his great men, his own story would still have been complete.

But there is one personage, the great Duke of Marlborough, whom Thackeray has sketched with peculiar rancour, and against whom, in the person of Esmond, he brings the most fantastic charges. It is unnecessary to say that the portrait is inconsistent with history as with itself. The Duke, indeed, as Thackeray paints him, is no man but a monster, a mere epitome of the vices, a proper pendant in inconsequent ferocity to the Dean of St. Patrick's, painted by the same hand. Being Commander-in-Chief, he traitorously accepts bribes from the French king, and loses battles that he may fill his own pocket. His personal sins are worse even

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than those which sully his public reputation. In cowardice and hypocrisy he almost outdoes Swift himself. "He would cringe to a shoeblack," we are told, "as he would flatter a minister or monarch; be haughty, be humble, threaten, repent, weep, grasp your hand (or stab you whenever he saw occasion)." These words are strangely applied to a hero, at whose feet all Europe knelt, and who never cringed to man or woman save to Sarah, his own implacable Duchess. Nor is this the worst. The Duke lied, we are told, cheated fond women, and robbed poor beggars of halfpence. And these charges are brought not by the villain of the piece, but by Esmond himself, who is not merely the hero of the romance, but who may, without injustice, be accepted as the vehicle of Thackeray's own opinion.

Of course a writer of fiction is not upon oath: he may handle history with a certain licence; but he oversteps his privilege when he paints white black, and breathes the very soul of meanness into a hero or a patriot. This is not the place to celebrate the serene intelligence, the supreme mastery of the great Commander, who never fought a battle which he did not win, who never besieged a city which he did not take, who was as great in diplomacy as in arms, and who, in Chesterfield's phrase, "possessed the graces in the highest degree, not to say engrossed them." What Marlborough was and what he achieved stand in letters of gold upon the scroll of history. But we may try to discover the reason for Thackeray's perverse hatred. Now, Thackeray failed as a historian, be-

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cause he always carried the prejudices of his own age back into the past. He judged the heroes of a dead century as though they were contemporary with himself and amenable to the same discipline. And one of his prejudices was a dislike of success. He was no hero-worshipper, attracted by dignity of manner or grandeur of achievement. To him Louis XIV was old "Square-Toes," and he found it possible to imagine the Duke of Marlborough pilfering from a beggar. Speaking in praise of the Duke of Berwick, he says "fire and genius were given to baser men"; and as it is not greatness but virtue which he admires, he is persuaded to suspect genius, where'er it be found.

But there was another reason why Thackeray should have looked with displeasure upon Marlborough. General Webb, the conqueror of Wynendael, was of his kindred, and having given Esmond a brief for the General, Thackeray bade him plead Webb's cause with all the energy of a violent partisan. Now, a novel is not the best place for polemics of this kind, and the controversy rudely interrupts the serene course of *Esmond*. Nevertheless, Thackeray has contrived an amusing portrait of General Webb, the *beau sabreur* with a grievance; and though, as he says, he does not love the stately Muse of History, he has sketched the battle of Wynendael with spirit and accuracy. The General, "as Paris handsome and as Hector brave," is neither a monster nor a caricature. He is just the foolish, vain, genial ruffian that he was in real life. Thack-

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eray makes no attempt to palliate his devotion to the bottle or his rancorous hatred for the Duke. He represents him as a reckless hero, impatient of discipline and contemptuous of his superior's prowess. And General Webb does not cut a very glorious figure when he comes home, to brag in his cups of the valiant deeds he did on the battle-field. In truth he well deserves the comment, put by Thackeray into St. John's mouth: "Il est fatiguant avec sa trompette de Wynendael." But he is the excuse for one excellently dramatic scene: the generals are dining with Prince Eugène, when *The London Gazette* arrives, and reveals the truth that General Webb's name is omitted from the despatch. 'Tis Marlborough's one appearance upon the stage, and Thackeray, as though conscious of his villain's greatness, puts but two phrases in his mouth. "There's some mistake, my dear General Webb," says he, as he notes the omission. And when Webb, with unpardonable insolence, hands him *The Gazette* on his sword's point, "Take it," says the Duke to his Master of the Horse. Not even Thackeray dare make the great Duke ridiculous upon the scene; and this reticence is some atonement for an infamous portrait.

But when Thackeray deserts the great ones of history for the personages of his own creation, there is no fumbling nor faltering. In none of his books does he keep so firm a grasp upon his characters as in *Esmond*, which is as consistent in portraiture as it is in style and effect. Nor was the task which he set himself a light one. Not only is the scene laid in

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the England of Queen Anne, but the action covers many years, and the actors grow up under the reader's gaze. Yet they are never false either to their time or to themselves. What Esmond was, when he first came to Castlewood, so he remained until the last chapter, when his dear mistress's "eyes of meek surrender yield to his respectful importunity." He may not realise an ideal of all that is noble in mankind. Some may detect in him the signs of a nascent priggishness. Some may object that now and again he resembles the author of his being too nearly to be a true Augustan,—that his essentially modern tirade upon the horrors of war, for instance, belongs more intimately to Thackeray himself than to a soldier of the eighteenth century. (Perhaps it was not for nothing that Esmond, when he went to Cambridge, kept in Thackeray's own rooms, "in the great court close by the gate.") Nevertheless he is a man of blood and bone, who acts always in accord with his own qualities. And in his dear mistress he is well matched. Lady Castlewood, an odd mixture of caprice and devotion, of kindliness and anger, is always the same and always herself. She, also, has certain traits which we could dispense with in our friends. She is almost as lachrymose as Mrs. Pendennis! She carries devotion too far, when she says to Esmond: "Let me kneel and worship you." But our preferences do not affect the truth of an exquisite portrait, subtly conceived and finely drawn.

Again, the main theme of the book is treated with the utmost delicacy. The transference of a man's

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love from daughter to mother is not a sympathetic motive from romance. But Thackeray insists so gravely upon Esmond's admiration and my Lady's gratitude, that her surrender is not surprising, is even inevitable. Mrs. Beatrix is not so successful. She, indeed, does not come into her own, until she appears in later life as Madame de Bernstein. Her caprices are too vain for belief; her rejections too heartless. Yet how picturesquely she is brought upon the scene! Who will ever forget her descent of the stairs, and the scarlet glint of her stocking? How splendid, too, is Esmond's enthusiasm, when he sees her again on his return from the wars! He had left her a girl; he now gazes upon "a woman whose eyes are fire, whose look is love, whose voice is the sweetest love-song, whose shape is perfect symmetry, health, decision, activity, whose foot as it plants itself upon the ground is firm but flexible, and whose motion, whether rapid or slow, is always perfect grace—agile as a nymph, lofty as a queen—now melting, now imperious, now sarcastic—there is no single movement of hers but is beautiful." What wonder that, as he thought of her, he felt young again, "remembering a paragon!"

But if Beatrix is a picturesque apparition rather than a real woman, the world of Castlewood, through which she walks a magnificent shadow, is admirably depicted. The vague background of rebellion and jesuitry gives an air of added gaiety and peace to the gay or tranquil inhabitants. My Lord Castlewood himself is one of those warm-hearted, foolish, shift-

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less gentlemen whom Thackeray knew so well how to draw. He is a Rawdon Crawley, more happily mated, and when the crisis of his destiny arrives he bears himself, as did Rawdon, like a man. Nothing could be better than his conduct of the duel with Lord Mohun, a duel most artfully composed from the records of the time. Nor is the son, Francis the Younger, unworthy his brave, spendthrift, debonair father. Though he is as vain as his sister, his vanity is tempered by an amiable disposition. "I know my place," he tells Esmond. "I'm not proud; I am simply Francis James, Viscount Castlewood in the peerage of Ireland." He is not clever, but he has what the old Dowager calls the *bel air*. Mr. Steele hits him off in a line. "The lad looks good things," says he, "and his laugh lights up a conversation as much as ten repartees from Mr. Congreve." And while the principal actors in the drama are well understood and well drawn, *Esmond* is singularly free from those stock-characters with which few novelists can dispense. True, the jesuit Holt, with his strange comings and goings, his secret hiding-places, and his inaccurate information, is a type rather than a man. True, also, the old Marchioness, the wicked Dowager of Chelsey, is but Miss Crawley artfully disguised, and more thickly coated with paint. But, when all deductions are made, Thackeray has achieved a success granted to few novelists besides Sir Walter Scott: he has peopled an unreal world with real men and women, for though the age is Anne's, Esmond and my Lady and Frank Castlewood are human

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enough to have lived at any time and under any sky.

But it is not merely for its characters that we esteem *Esmond*, nor for its many passages of dignified, even elevated, prose. The book will ever be memorable also for one or two scenes of haunting beauty, or dramatic intensity. Who can ever forget Esmond's visit to Walcote after his return from Vigo? It is in Winchester Cathedral that he sees my Lady Castlewood and Frank after his estrangement, bringing back with him, in Tom Tusher's phrase, "Gaditanian laurels." "And Harry's coming home to supper. Huzzay! huzzay!" cries my lord. "Mother, I shall run home and bid Beatrix put her ribands on. Beatrix is a maid of honour, Henry. Such a fine set-up minx!" The passage expresses the sentiment, not the sentimentality, of home-coming, without a word too much, without a note falsely struck. Still better is the last chapter of all, wherein Esmond and the young lord pursue the Prince to Castlewood. These dozen pages are, I think, Thackeray's highest achievement. The three men are perfectly realised—Esmond dignified and austere, as becomes the head of the house; Frank chivalrous and impulsive, like the sound-hearted boy he is; and his Majesty, when once his rage is mastered, every inch a king. "Eh, bien, Vicomte," says the young Prince, who was a boy, and a French boy, "il ne nous reste qu'un chose à faire: embrassons nous." It is a brave picture, bravely painted, without a stroke awry, without a superfluous touch.

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Since *Esmond* many hundreds (or is it thousands?) of historical novels have been published; yet *Esmond's* supremacy is still unchallenged. The author's own opinion of the book changed with his temper. One day he finds it "clever, but also stupid, and no mistake"; another, he wishes "the new novel was not so grand and melancholy"; and when he contemplated it in all the bravery of its three volumes, "*Esmond*," he wrote, "looks very stately and handsome in print, and bore as he is, I think he will do me credit." Thackeray's prediction has been fulfilled. *Esmond* did him infinite credit, and came nearest to being "the complete good book" which, said he, it was a shame the author didn't write.

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CHAPTER VII

THE NEWCOMES—A PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The Newcomes[1] was published to a chorus of applause. The Press, of whatever temper and complexion, received it in respectful admiration. "This is Mr. Thackeray's masterpiece," said the old-fashioned *Quarterly*, "as it is undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of English fiction." *The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, the brand-new "organ of the pre-Raphaelites, was no less emphatic, declaring *The Newcomes* "the masterpiece of all novel-writing," and numbering its author "among the great naturalists of all time." Since 1855 the word "naturalist" has borne many a heavy burden. It has supported the dullest researches of M. Zola and his followers. It has been inscribed upon the banner of those who believe that nothing is true save the abnormal, and properly enough it has fallen into disrepute. But in the mouth of the pre-Raphaelites it was a term of adulation. They believe that all nature should be as meticulously observed and as carefully described as the foregrounds of their own works, and in calling Thackeray a "naturalist," they did but share with

[1] *The Newcomes: Memoirs of a most respectable Family*, edited by Arthur Pendennis, Esq.: published in twenty-four monthly numbers from October, 1853, to August, 1855.

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him their own glory. Nor was the term wholly misapplied. In a sense, completely opposite to that which it has since attained, it fits Thackeray closely enough. So far as he looked upon the common aspects of life, so far as he did not travel beyond his own experience, Thackeray was a true naturalist.

The reader will vainly seek hairbreadth escapes or curiosities of vice in the pages of *The Newcomes*, which is so close to nature as to contain nothing abnormal. It was this perfect correspondence with the average knowledge of life which partly explains the book's popularity. But there is another reason why *The Newcomes* should have found favour in the world's eye. It seemed Mr. Thackeray's masterpiece, because it was most characteristic of his talent and prejudices. It was, so to say, *Pendennis* carried to a higher power, and it was acceptable to all those who thought that *Esmond* was a rude interruption to the author's real work. In other words, the thick-and-thin admirers of Thackeray found in *The Newcomes* precisely what they expected, and found it in fuller measure. Here was the same easy style of writing which distinguished *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis*, the same easy treatment of great personages, the same liberal mixture of over-sweet honey and too-bitter gall. But in half a century the unessential has been winnowed from that which matters, and we may look upon what appeared "the masterpiece of all novel-writing" with a less partial eye.

The Newcomes is a comedy conducted, for the most part, in defiance of the comic spirit. Instead of

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sketching a serious situation, and demonstrating with a laugh its inherent comedy, the author too often puts his characters into a situation of comedy and proves that it is fit for nothing else than a sermon. If this be a "natural" book, our fathers, like Coleridge, must have never done anything but preach. *The Newcomes* is long—in its newest edition it covers more than eight hundred pages—yet if you took away all the trite essays upon morality, all the exhortations to good conduct, all the tearful deplorations of villainy, the trouble of reading would be halved, and the pleasure doubled. The most trivial episode in the book is an excuse for a moving discourse, and while the virtues of some actors are exaggerated, the villainies of others are monstrously overdone.

Like so many optimists, who fondly believe in the perfectibility of the human race, Thackeray had a touching faith in deep and manifold wickedness. It is thus that he describes a punter at Baden: "That man, so calm and well-bred, with a string of orders on his breast, so well dressed, with such white hands, has stabbed trusting hearts; severed family ties; written lying vows; signed false oaths; torn up pitilessly tender appeals for redress, and tossed away into the fire supplications blistered with tears; packed cards and cogged dice; or used pistol and sword as calmly and dexterously as he now ranges his battalions of gold pieces." The cogging of dice and the packing of cards are easily credible, but who can put faith in the lying vows and stabbed hearts? These, indeed, are the trappings of the crudest melodrama, and

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are out of place in a comedy of manners. It is not surprising that the worthy J. J., himself a strayling from a sentimental theatre, should believe in and "shrink away from such lawless people," but their introduction gives an air of unreality to Thackeray's "naturalism," and suggests that the Pre-Raphaelite view of life was as primitive as the inspiration of their painting.

The truth is, that whenever Thackeray mounted upon his predicatory hobby-horse (and this spirited steed prances energetically through *The Newcomes*), he does not know how far it will carry him. He apostrophises his readers; he apostrophises his characters; he calls upon vague unseen powers to redress the balance. "*Beati illi!*" he exclaims, when he regards the tie of friendship which unites the Colonel and his son. "*Beati illi!* oh man of the world, whose wearied eyes may glance over this page, may those who come after you so regard you! O generous boy, who read in it, may you have such a friend to trust and cherish in youth, and in future days fondly and proudly to remember!" The wearied man of the world is as purely fantastic as the gentleman of the stabbed hearts and false oaths, and it is difficult to see why he is called in to wonder at a simple situation. And the puzzle is all the greater, because Thackeray was very quick to detect false sentiment in others. The Washerwoman of Finchley Common always moved his ridicule; but he was not above taking a leaf out of her book. "Let us be thankful for our race," says he, when he remem-

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bers Thomas Newcome's earliest friend, "as we think of the love that blesses some of us. Surely it has something of heaven in it, and angels celestial may rejoice in it, and admire it." However worthy the sentiment may be, it is too obvious to need expression; and, thus expressed, it seems to echo the very tone and accent of the Washerwoman herself.

However, Thackeray was not eminent for his philosophy, which was superficial, nor for his moral reflections, which were commonplace; and the chief merit of *The Newcomes*, as of *Pendennis*, lies in its characterisation. A word first as to the conduct of the story. His earliest critics admired, with justice, the ease wherewith he "kept every member of the crowd faithful to his own nature." A vast number of actors play their part upon the stage of *The Newcomes*; they grow from youth to middle life under the eye of the reader, and they seldom, if ever, do violence to the law of their being. Moreover, the novel, if it has neither plot nor hero, presents the history of a whole family, and covers two generations. It is true that one lady dies, and is brought to life again, but this is the sole outrage upon probability, and none of the others ever goes back upon himself. So, while Thackeray holds the threads tightly in his own hands, he places them unravelled in the hands of the reader. The exposition of the family and its early history is a marvel of lucidity, which, though it is packed with information, is never dull.

Yet, if the characters are consistent each with itself, they are not always consistent with the general plan.

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In other words, like the personages of *Vanity Fair*, they are drawn in varying planes. The Colonel, for instance, Charles Honeyman, and Fred Bayham are overcharged to caricature, and are not designed on the same scale as Ethel and Barnes Newcome, the best examples of Thackeray's "naturalism." At the first publication of the book, Colonel Newcome[1] seems to have won all the suffrages. His nobility of character attached the soft-hearted at once. He was said to exceed Don Quixote himself, upon whom he was modelled, in humane dignity. His death affected the public, like the death of Paul Dombey, with the sense of personal loss. Opinion has now undergone a reaction, and the majority is content to accept Thackeray's own opinion. "He is a dear old boy," he wrote to Miss Proctor, "but confess you think him something of a twaddler." That is precisely what he is: he is a twaddler, who harmonises very ill with his surroundings, even when all deductions are made for his training and for the many years he has spent in India.

At his first entry into the Cave of Harmony, he makes it evident that his style and stature are not those of the men who surround him. He is at once too simple and too pompous to be naturalistic. "And this is the abode of the Muses," says he, as he looks

[1] Ingenuity has been busy in seeking the original of Colonel Newcome. He is probably a composite portrait, which owes something to Sir Richmond Shakespear, something to an old pensioner at the Charterhouse, whom Thackeray visited, but most of all to the author's stepfather, Major Carmichael Smyth.

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about him with an amiable pride. He thinks Hoskins as good as Incledon. He invites Mr. Nadab, the little Jew, for whom we may read Sloman, to dine with him, and at every sentimental ditty "the tears trickle down the honest warrior's cheek." But when Captain Costigan has finished the second verse of the ribald song which he volunteers, the Colonel starts up, seizes his stick, and roars out Silence! "ferocious as though he had been going to do battle with a Pindaree." Tradition assures us that the song the Captain sang was the famous "Sam Hall,"[1] and if it were, it is difficult to understand why it was so stubborn a rock of offence. But the Colonel's fighting blood is up; he involves the whole company in Costigan's degradation and dishonour; and, as the chronicler says, "that uplifted arm had somehow fallen on the back of every man in the room." In this same spirit of the antique world he deplores the society into which he is thrown. His brothers' lack of cordiality is as unintelligible to him as Costigan's drunken shame. He carries unselfishness to the point of inhumanity; his generosity, his kindliness, his folly are

[1] The song which is said to have aroused the Colonel's wrath, the notorious *Sam Hall*, though it is familiar by tradition, has not yet got into print. The hero of the ditty was one Jack Hall, a chimney-sweeper—his name was changed to Sam by a poet's licence—who was hanged at Tyburn in 1707 for breaking the dwelling-house of Captain Guyon. He was so famous a rascal in his own day that he inspired an elegy and an epitaph, as well as the song which still survives. The "pretty new Tune," called *The Chimney-Sweep*, to which the song was sung, may be found in Tom D'Urfey's *Wit and Mirth* (1712).

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all too great for flesh and blood. Even the pathetic scene, in which the Colonel says "Adsum," does not move us as it should, because we have so little confidence that the Colonel ever lived and breathed. Thackeray has spared his readers nothing; he has deafened their ears with an appeal for pity. And when the pity should be given, it is perforce withheld; for who can shed tears for the travesty of a man?

Charles Honeyman, too, is a frank caricature, and though his hold upon life is not very secure, he is as genial an impostor as fiction can present. On his first appearance, with a begging letter, he strikes the right note. Now, Charles has a style, which gives a weight to his lightest word, a sense of importance to his meanest action. Having ventured his all in the acquisition of Lady Whittlesea's chapel, he addresses the Colonel, upon whom he has drawn a bill. "Have I genius?" he asks in his best rhetorical manner. "Am I blessed with gifts of eloquence to thrill and soothe, to arouse the sluggish, to terrify the sinful, to cheer and convince the timid, to lead the blind groping in darkness, and to trample the audacious sceptic in the dust? My own conscience, besides a hundred testimonials from places of popular, most popular, worship, from reverend prelates, from distinguished clergy, tell me I have these gifts." So he cheerfully listens to the voice, which urges Charles Honeyman to go forth, and fight the good fight; he as cheerfully mulcts the Colonel of two hundred and fifty pounds. But he is readily eloquent even upon the simplest

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themes. In lofty terms he refers to the brothers Newcome, "whom to name," says he, "is to designate two of the merchant princes of the wealthiest city the world has ever known." "The fellow is always in the pulpit," muttered Barnes Newcome with perfect truth; but the pulpit was his profession, and he was not one to forego an advertisement.

He is, indeed, a very accomplished cleric; he sings; he plays on the violoncello; he has a thousand tales and quips, wherewith he entertains the ladies who worship at his shrine. His notions of luxury, perhaps, better befit a French Abbé of the old school than the incumbent of Lady Whittlesea's chapel. But the labourer is worthy of his hire, and why should not the impassioned orator live in comfortable ease, and beguile his leisure with the perusal of impudent French books, signed by the hands of Balzac, Dumas, or Paul de Kock? With such qualities, and such ambitions, he is naturally a sensitive soul. In the words of his friend F. B., Charles was "great in the lachrymatory line"; and it was said that "no man in London understood the ring-business or the pocket-handkerchief-business better, or smothered his emotion more beautifully." But poor Charles was ill suited to fight the harsh, unsympathetic world. He fell upon evil days; he mortgaged his chapel to one Jew, himself to another; and Sherrick, the Hebrew, who used the basement of the sacred edifice as a wine-vault, might, as F. B. said, "turn Lady Whittlesea into a synagogue, and heave the chief Rabbi into the pulpit."

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Yet all was not lost. F. B. was still fertile in resource. He was taking tea with Mrs. Sherrick when the great idea came to him. The singing boys had all gone to the Cave of Harmony. Why should not the ladies take their place, and sing Handel to the strains of an organ? It was a harmless dodge, as F. B. said, but it drew immensely. Mrs. Sherrick and her daughter adopted a nun-like costume, practised by moonlight in the chapel, and "the thing took." Charles Honeyman was himself again, and a few lessons from Husler, of the Haymarket, put a fine polish on his elocution. "His sermons are old," as F. B. confessed, "but, so to speak, he has got them up with new scenery, dresses, and effects!" The flowers came from Covent Garden. The Flemish-painted window was picked up in Wardour Street; the new hymn-books were large and gilt. In brief, all the trappings were superb, and fashion set with a favouring breeze towards Lady Whittlesea's chapel. Charles himself, splendid in prosperity, affected a mediæval pose. An odour of mille-fleurs rustled by as he took his place at the desk. His vestments were simpler and more austere than heretofore; the curl, upon which he had lavished so much care, was gone from his forehead. The performance succeeded marvellously. Sherrick paced up and down the aisle, saying, "Capital house, wasn't it?" and Honeyman's fortune was remade.

Honeyman is one very good example of Thackeray's caricature. Mr. Frederick Bayham is another, extravagant as the accomplished, aristocratic Stiggins.

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Now F. B. also has a style, more robust and flamboyant than his friend's. F. B. is built upon a large scale. He weighs fourteen stone, and his boots, "known by the name of the Prussian general who came up to help the other christener of boots at Waterloo," his trousers, his dressing-gown, ragged and flowing, even his voice, are all large. He speaks in the grandiloquent manner which befits the man of letters. "*Salve, spes, fidei, lumen ecclesiæ*," thus he salutes his friend Honeyman; and then tells him "by cock and pye" that his wine is not worth a "bender" a glass. He has an easy gift of imitation and of insolence. He gives an exhibition of his uncle the bishop; he reminds the Reverend Charles of the lies which he told at school, and he desires to inform Colonel Newcome that he is "an orphan himself, in needy circumstances, and he heartily wishes he would adopt him." Meanwhile he is delighted to dine with the Colonel, and to declare his "deliberate opinion that F. B. has got into a good thing."

But F. B., too, "descended from the ancient kings that long the Tuscan sceptre swayed," has his moments of didacticism. It is not a panegyric of debt that he sings, like Panurge, but a threnody. He addresses a solemn warning to Clive, telling him that he dodges down a street to avoid a boot-shop, or that his colossal frame trembles if a sudden hand is put upon his shoulder. And all this he does in a style which gives you the impression that he is drawn from life, and then exaggerated beyond the measure of reality. He is eminent in whatever company he finds himself,

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whether it be at the Cave of Harmony or in Park Lane. When *The Pall Mall Gazette* offers him an opening for his talents, he turns his hand to anything with a joyous facility. Art, the drama, theology, are the same to him. But his masterpiece, no doubt, is "Pulpit Pencillings," which, signed Laud Latimer, give a tone of rare respectability to the paper. "You wouldn't suppose, now, my young Clive," says he, "that the same hand which pens the Art criticisms, occasionally when his Highness Pendennis is lazy, takes a minor theatre, or turns the sportive epigram, or the ephemeral paragraph, should adopt a grave theme on a Sunday, and chronicle the Sermons of British Divines?" But thus it is that he assisted in the rehabilitation of the Rev. Charles Honeyman, and even that enterprise did not exhaust his versatility. When the Bundelcund Banking Company was at the height of its prosperity, F. Bayham betook himself to the city. Here, as elsewhere, he cut a splendid figure. He moved among "managers and city nobs"; he ate "kibobs with nabobs." He took the rooms which were once graced by the Rev. Charles; his costume was at once more cleanly and yet more variegated than before. No longer dependent upon the pittance which he drew from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, he assumed what he deemed his proper station in life, and even contemplated marriage and a settlement. But into whatever situation he was cast, F. B. filled it in all senses with ease and humour, and he remains one of the masterpieces in Thackeray's gallery of portraits.

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But excellent as these two are,—Honeyman and F. B.,—they are not triumphs of "naturalism," and if we are on the lookout for that quality, we must seek it in Ethel Newcome and her brother. Now, Ethel is not a flood of tears, a mere bundle of sensibilities; she is a real woman, and assuredly Thackeray drew few characters which surpass her in verisimilitude and individuality. At her first entrance upon the scene, child though she is, she is already determined and herself. "Alone, farouche, and intractable,"—it is in these terms that she is described,—and "alone, farouche, and intractable" she remains to the end. The prejudices of her family affect her so little that she is ready to defend the Colonel and his son. "You are always sneering about our uncle, and saying unkind things about Clive," she darts out at Barnes, and her courage equals the generosity of her thought. She is represented as gravely proud, yet kindly withal, "quick to detect affectation or insincerity, impatient of dulness and pomposity," and these qualities, added to a gift of sarcasm, and a love of truth, which flashes from her grey eyes, render her unpopular with both men and women.

But Thackeray is not content with enumerating her qualities: he makes her speak and act always in accord with them. In her many encounters with her brother and Lady Kew she is quietly victorious: conscious of the schemes which are laid for her marriage, she frustrates them with a natural bravery, and an honest simplicity, which are admirably depicted. "We are sold," she says; "we are as much sold as

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Turkish women;" yet Kew might have held her to the bargain had he not fallen below her lofty standard. When Lady Kew insults her, "Keep your bad names," says she, "for my Aunt Julia; she is sick and weak, and can't defend herself." She resolves to accept neither abuse from the old lady nor lectures from Kew. At Baden she defies every one of them—Kew, his mother, and the Duchesse d'Ivry. She keeps the famous ball alive almost by herself. She dances with Count Punter, with Captain Blackball, with any one that comes along, and in answer to remonstrance asks, "Was she to be so proud as not to know Lord Kew's friends?"

It is not surprising, therefore, that she should despise the humble obedience of Lady Clara. "The sight of the patient timid little thing chafed Ethel, who was always more haughty and flighty and bold when in Clara's presence than at any other time." But, despite the intrigue which goes on about her, she is resolute to direct her own life. She refuses the honest Kew, who "takes his share of the pain as a boy at school takes his flogging, stoutly and in silence," and she refuses him from a scruple, which, though honourable enough, she might have waived. In her treatment of Lord Farintosh, her other lover, she behaves with a pride and dignity which the poor Marquis cannot understand; and the whole scene is written with more than common skill. In brief, though Thackeray too often held a loose hand upon his plot, though he not seldom permitted his personages to act and speak as they listed, he treated Ethel

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Newcome with consistent sympathy and care. He had made up his mind about her before he began, and he never forgot the admirable qualities which distinguish his heroine. He has sketched her appearance with a precision which is rare in his works. She is tall, he tells us, "a severe Diana"; her hair and eyebrows are jet black, and in her black hair is "a gentle ripple," as when a fresh breeze blows over a *melan hudor*"; her eyes are grey; her mouth rather large; "her teeth as regular and bright as Lady Kew's own." It is by these signs that we may recognise her, and if her features are familiar to our sight, her heart and character are yet more clearly revealed to our understanding; she has no kinship with the Lauras and Helens, whose tears have washed the truth from so many of Thackeray's pages; she is a real woman, faithfully drawn, and the reader cannot but regret that in the end she is mated with so indistinct and irresolute a young man as Clive.

Barnes, her brother, is made of other metal; yet he also rings true to himself and to his author's purpose. Nothing can surpass the placid self-assurance wherewith this "fair-haired young gentleman, languid and pale, and arrayed in the very height of fashion," receives the Colonel. "Very happy to see you, I'm sure," said the young man. "You find London very much changed since you were here? Very good time to come—the very full of the season." He is so pleased with himself and his career that he patronises not merely his uncle but Sir Thomas de Boots and the other fogeys that he meets at his club. He is

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abashed at nothing—not even when he has to confess that he has never heard of *Don Quixote*. And why, indeed, should he have heard of Don Quixote? The one end and aim of his life is to make money. For this he would even sacrifice his own pleasures, and after all what are pleasures to a man who worships wealth and respectability with a constant heart? If he speaks of business, he instantly drops his languor and affectation, and becomes simple, selfish, and alert. In a moment he is as "keen as the oldest curmudgeon; a lad with scarce a beard to his chin, he would pursue his bond as rigidly as Shylock." The Colonel loathes his worldliness even more bitterly than his insolence. "If he is like this at twenty, what will he be like at fifty?" groans the old soldier.

Above all, the young man is determined never to compromise himself in the eyes of his fellows. He "never missed going to church or dressing for dinner. He never kept a tradesman waiting for his money." For the same reason he never drank too much, and always showed up at his office spick and span. Of course he is a cheat and a coward, to whom honour is of far less importance than the law. He takes charge of letters, and keeps them back. When the famous paper is found in Orme's *History*, which should benefit Clive, Barnes stoutly refuses to make restitution. But though he is resolute enough in holding on to his money-bags, at the mere suggestion of a quarrel, this "Fenchurch Street fire-eater" takes alarm. When Clive, having thrown a glass of wine in Barnes' face overnight, visits him in the

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morning with an apology, he receives him with a nonchalant civility, as though nothing had happened. "You are come to breakfast, I hope," says he, and swears that he has forgotten the row and the broken glass. When he should have resented the appearance of Jack Belsize at Baden, he trembles at the very mention of his name, and shifts his hand uneasily to a pistol at a moving shadow. But it is to the Colonel and Clive that he most conspicuously shows the white feather. He refuses to fight the Colonel on account of their relationship, and assumes a noble rage at the enforced discretion. But when Clive takes up his father's quarrel, he turns tail and flees in an agony of terror. It is old Sir Thomas de Boots who best sums the matter up. "Yesterday," says he to Barnes, "you talked as if you would bite the Colonel's head off, and to-day, when his son offers you every accommodation, by dash, sir, you're afraid to meet him. It's my belief you had better send for a policeman. A 22 is your man, Sir Barnes Newcome." On the other hand, Thackeray, having for the moment deserted caricature for naturalism, does not make Barnes all bad. He endows him with easy manners, a bitter satirical tongue, and a gift of waltzing. He even admits that while he is not handsome there is "something in his face odd-looking and distinguished." He makes him a present of beautiful feet and hands. In brief, as Thackeray explains, Barnes has an air. He has an air when at the Newcome Athenæum he shows that the true office of the bard is to appeal to the affections;

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that "to decorate the homely threshold, to wreathe flowers round the domestic hearth, is the delightful duty of the Christian singer." And it is only in moments of stress, as when Belsize drags him from his saddle, that his air evaporates. But Thackeray had the tact never to make him inhuman, and he is from first to last a piece of genuine and faithful portraiture.

Of the other characters some are good, some bad, yet Thackeray moves them all on and off the stage with an adroitness which the reader cannot but admire. Clive himself is a florid young man, for whom it is difficult to entertain much sympathy. A livelier Pendennis, he is generous, and gay, and noble-hearted, and all that. "His laughter," we are told, "cheered one like wine"; but his very virtues render him incredible, and he leaves pretty much the same impression upon us as a barber's block. Moreover, he is a painter, and painters in fiction are always dull, with their chatter of Raphael and Michael Angelo, and the sketches which they dash off at a stroke. As for Rosey, she is but the shadow of a shade, which disappears as silently as it comes. Her mother, on the other hand, the famous campaigner, is made of sterner stuff, both humanly and artistically. She is drawn with so firm a hand, her intrigues and her avarice are so vividly depicted, that she seems to have passed out of literature into experience, and to be recognisable wherever we have the misfortune to meet her. And old Lady Kew, who uses her poor daughter Julia as a pincushion, and who is, it must be confessed, a trifle melodramatic, takes her place in the same corner of

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the gallery as Miss Crawley and the Baroness Bernstein.

Most of the rest we are content to forget. J. J. and Miss Cann, for instance, are so highly characteristic of their own age that they are wholly uninteresting to ours. But there is one scene in the drama, laid at Baden, which not merely introduces a set of Parisians, rare in English fiction, but which is composed in such a vein of comedy as Thackeray seldom struck. The trappings are as gay as the drama: the tables, the avenues, the music of Baden are indicated with a light hand. The ball, whereat the fates of many are decided, is as good as a scene from an old comedy. Above all, the French men and women, who intrigue and gamble in the little capital of the German state, are essentially French. They are enlivened, it is true, with more than a touch of caricature; but for all that they think and act as befits their nationality, and they could not under any circumstances be mistaken for the compatriots of *The Newcomes*. The English novelist who would depict a Frenchman is so often content to sketch a Briton, change his clothes and break his English, that Thackeray's performance is the more remarkable. Indeed we know not where to match his Floracs and his Ivrys, unless it be in the Renée of *Beauchamp's Career*, who, however, is a greater achievement, since she is natural as a flower, and owes nothing to the brilliant colours of caricature.

But if to be prophetic is to be true, then Thackeray deserves the highest praise. His Madame d'Ivry,

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Royalist, Philippist, Catholic, Huguenot, the exponent of all the fads and every fantasy, the haggard siren, who believes herself the image of Mary Queen of Scots, has been reincarnated a dozen times since Thackeray. She died in Paris a brief five years ago, and in Paris, we make no doubt, she is living again to-day. And *ce petit Cabasse*, the student of law, whose lyrics—" les Râles d'un Asphyxié "—have not passed unnoticed, whose family has been at feud with l'Angleterre since the days of the Prince Noir—was he not born again a " deliquescent " some fifteen years since ? Did he not frequent the *cénacles* of the Latin Quarter, and print his verses in the journals of the *décadence?* True, these types are eternal ; but Thackeray, despite his English blood, understood them perfectly, and drew them with an astonishing accuracy.

But by far the most engaging of them all is M. de Florac, who plays an entertaining and distinguished part in the comedy of Baden. Under all circumstances he proves himself a gentleman and a man of honour. Thackeray wrote few better pages than those which describe Clive's meeting with him at Baden. Fortune has been unkind to M. de Florac ; she has emptied his purse, his portmanteaus, his jewel-box, his linen-closet. " This campaign has been my Moscow, *mon cher*," he tells Clive. " I am conquered by Bénazet ; I have lost in almost every combat. . . . Sometimes I have a mind to go home ; my mother, who is an angel of forgiveness, would receive her prodigal, and kill the fatted veal for me. But what will you ? He annoys me—the do-

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mestic veal." So they dine at Duluc's, and are waited upon by Frédéric, who plays Balderstone to Florac's Ravenswood. "Yes; I am Edgar," exclaims the nobleman, who, even after Moscow, is still gay, polished, and good-tempered. And, then, acknowledging that the passions tear him, that play is fatal, but not so fatal as women, he proposes to be Clive's Mentor. "I saw you *rôder* round the green tables," says he with a fine fancy, "and marked your eyes as they glistened over the heaps of gold, and looked at some of our beauties of Baden." But, though he suffer defeat, he is still master of his destiny. Perturbed neither by wealth nor by poverty, he is equal to every encounter. Being a Catholic, he does not feel a complete sympathy with his wife, *née* Higg, of Manchesterre, in the comté of Lancastre; being a gentleman, he treats her with a touching deference. When his cousin dies, and he becomes a prince, he is as modest (and as arrogant) as ever. He delights in penny cigars, and when Barnes offers him a seat in his brougham, "Bah!" he says, "I prefer the *péniboat*." With perfect discretion he suppresses his princely title; with perfect philosophy he justifies the suppression. "Moncontour cannot dine better than Florac," says he. "Florac has two louis in his pocket, and Moncontour exactly forty francs." When he grows rich he is still the same Paul de Florac, "sober and dignified"; but in all circumstances he is charming, and Thackeray was in his gayest mood when he invented M. le Prince de Moncontour.

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In conclusion, *The Newcomes* is a formless book with brilliant passages, and it bears in every chapter the traces of Thackeray's haphazard method. The story was "revealed" to him, he says, at Berne in Switzerland, where he had strayed into a little wood, and both characters and plot grew under his hand as they listed. It was written at odd times and in odd places, and when it was finished, Thackeray contemplated it, as he contemplated all his books, with a curious aloofness. He hardly knew whether the people of his drama "are not true; whether they do not live near us somewhere." Such was his attitude towards his creations. He thought them alive; he heard their voices; he was touched by their grief; but he was never really master of them; and the result is that half *The Newcomes* is irrelevant.

In 1857 Thackeray permitted himself a holiday from literature, and stood for Parliament. His views were Radical, and the seat which he chose to contest was Oxford. Nor was it unexpected, this incursion into politics, for politics had attracted him ever since, at the age of twenty, he had aided Charles Buller at Liskeard. In *The Constitutional*, as we have seen, he had "supported consistently, though feebly, the great cause of Radicalism," and he had expressed his sympathy with Richard Cobden by contributing a drawing or two to *The Anti-Corn-Law Circular*. But though his interest in the affairs of the country was constant, he cannot be called a violent partisan, and it would puzzle the most ingenious reader to formulate his political creed. The author of *The Book of Snobs*

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was obviously a staunch democrat, who loved the people for its own sake, and who devoutly believed in the natural wickedness of monarchs. "I would like to see all men equal," he wrote in 1840, "and this bloated aristocracy blasted to the wings of all the winds." When *Punch* gave him his chance, he descended from the general to the particular, and attacked the Prince Consort, his hat, his Chancellorship, and all that was his with a ceaseless violence.[1] The Bal Boudré, which the queen gave in 1845, aroused his bitterest scorn, and inspired him to a piece of satire that was neither pointed nor in good taste.[2]

But for all his detestation of kings, for all his love of the free and enlightened democracy, he had no sympathy with the people when it attempted to capture its "rights" by force. He found its "views about equalising property" mere robbery, and he "thanked God that they had not a man of courage at their head who might set the kingdom in a blaze."

[1] In Mr. Spielmann's *Hitherto Unidentified Contributions of W. M. Thackeray to 'Punch'* the curious will find ample material for forming a judgment on Thackeray's political opinions.

[2] It has been said by more than one of his champions that Thackeray had a profound admiration for the Queen and Prince Albert. If this were so, he showed it in the oddest fashion, and Shirley Brooks's well-known lines, quoted by Mr. Spielmann, expressed the general indignation:—

> "We'll clear thy brain. Look westerly. See where yon Palace stands;
> Stains of the mud flung there by thee are on thy dirty hands."

But Shirley Brooks wrongly attributed the offence to Douglas Jerrold, with whose disloyalty he contrasted

> "The truthful, social sketch, drawn with Titmarshian skill
> With colour bright as Dickens's, and pencil keener still."

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In other words, his love of the people was platonic, and was more than counterbalanced by his hatred of physical force. So, too, in his treatment of Ireland, he never showed a bigoted admiration of one party or the other. He judged even the great O'Connell on his merits, and while to-day he pronounced him "the greatest man in the Empire," and eloquently compared him to Washington, to-morrow he is a buffoon, who, when "the Want of a Nation stares him in the face, replies with a grin and a gibe," an old sharper, who takes his compatriots' money, and "scorns even to hide the jugglery by which he robs them." His views upon Young Ireland were equally inconsistent. In 1843 he contributed an effusion—"Daddy, I'm Hungry"—to *The Nation;* yet two years later he had never heard of Davis, whom he attacks with becoming energy. And through it all he was constant only to one thing—Home Rule—which he supported at first for the sake of Ireland, and secondly that Great Britain might be well rid of a disloyal and avaricious partner.

Such was Thackeray's political record, when in 1857 he opposed Mr. Cardwell at Oxford. The circumstances of the election were peculiar: the sitting member, Mr. Neate, had been unseated for "two-pennyworth of bribery which he never committed," and Thackeray frankly declared that "he would not have stood against Cardwell, had he known he was coming down." But having stood, he fought the election with all his energy. The foremost plank in his platform was the question of reform, which he

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had strenuously supported ever since his appearance at Liskeard in 1832; and he not only pronounced himself in favour of the ballot, but declared that it was his ambition to amend the suffrage "in nature, as well as in numbers." In accord with the principles which he had always professed, he believed that the State would be benefited "by the skill and talents of persons less aristocratic" than those who were then administering it, nor did he spare the electors the familiar commonplaces about "hard-working, honest, rough-handed men." At the same time he loyally promised to "advance the social happiness, the knowledge, and the power of the people," and he lost many votes by advocating the opening of museums on Sunday. But throughout the election he showed himself a man of the world rather than a serious politician. He owned that he "could not speak very well, but," said he, "I shall learn," and he plainly recognised that talking was not the chief business of the House of Commons. That he was not returned was not surprising, least of all to himself, and at the declaration of the poll he made his happiest speech, told the story of Gregson and Gully, how the victorious prize-fighter was the first to shake the hand of the vanquished, and declared that he would retire, to "take my place with my pen and ink at my desk, and leave to Mr. Cardwell a business which I am sure he understands better than I do." Thus ended Thackeray's one political interlude, which in his own phrase was "very good fun," and the failure of which none regretted less than himself.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE VIRGINIANS—THE EDITORSHIP OF THE *CORNHILL*

So he returned to take his place with his pen and ink at his desk, and four months after his defeat at Oxford there appeared the first number of a new novel—*The Virginians*,[1] *a Tale of the Last Century*. As *Esmond* was the natural result of the lectures on *The Humourists*, so *The Virginians* came in due sequence after the lectures upon *The Four Georges*, and Thackeray's two journeys to America. But no books could differ more widely in treatment than *Esmond* and *The Virginians*. *Esmond* is a deliberate work of art, composed with a definite purpose, and in a definite style. It is the worst fault of *The Virginians* that it is without form or shape. It is less a novel than a series of essays interspersed with anecdotes, and with experiments in the art of literary imitation. It professes by a permissible fiction to be written by a descendant of the Warrington family. But Thackeray too often forgets this fact, and lets the story write itself in the language of the eighteenth century. The consequence is that the two styles constantly overlap. The story is now a modern

[1] *The Virginians* was published in twenty-four monthly parts, from November, 1857, to October, 1859.

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retrospect, now an antique experience, and the author is as uncertain of his style as he is mutable in his point of view. Again and again he will interrupt a narrative which belongs to the eighteenth century with references to Carlyle, or to Mr. Disraeli's House of Commons. One thing only is unchanging,—the moral reflection, which is always of the nineteenth century, whether it be expressed by the author or by one of the actors in his drama. The result is a jumble of interests, a confusion of tongues.

To say that the book is at its best when Thackeray most resolutely suppresses himself is superfluous, and the sudden intrusion of modern ideas may generally be taken as a sign of the author's boredom with his own characters. Yet, even where he adheres most closely to his period, he shows in *The Virginians* signs of haste and lassitude. The real personages whom he introduces are too near to history to be part of fiction. Tunbridge Wells in his eyes is a sort of Madame Tussaud's, in which all the celebrities of the time are collected, clothed and coloured precisely as you would expect them, and obviously wax. No doubt March and Selwyn, Johnson and Richardson, James Wolfe and the Countess of Yarmouth, were alive at the same time; no doubt, also, an author who includes them all in one chapter kills many birds with a single stone. But he does it at too high a cost. He sacrifices probability beyond all hope, and where he should present the portrait of a man he suggests the research of a popular text-book. And while he destroys the verisimilitude of his characters by their

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mere proximity one to another, he spoils each of them by making him, as it were, a sublimation of the truth. He treats them as he treated Steele and Addison in *Esmond:* he never permits them to utter a word that is unexpected. They must be true, every one of them, to popular biography; and yet we believe that even Lord March and Jack Morris sometimes opened their mouths without making a bet.

The Virginians, then, is a thing of patches, not an organic whole, and though some of the chapters thus loosely knit together are humorous or picturesque, it is impossible to sustain one's interest in a book so various as this in style, character, and intention. But it would not have been written by Thackeray if it had not contained some half-dozen scenes of vivid drama, and more than one admirably drawn portrait. The purpose of the book, to which, by the way, the author did not long adhere, is made clear in the opening sentence. "On the library wall of one of the most famous writers of America," says Thackeray, "there hang two crossed swords, which his relatives wore in the great War of Independence. The one sword was gallantly drawn in the service of the king, the other was the weapon of a brave and honoured republican soldier." The two swords might have suggested an interesting study of opposing loyalties and severing patriotisms. But Thackeray forgot his swords long before he came to the end of his novel; and the fact that the two Warringtons took different sides in the American Rebellion is either irrelevant or obscured.

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What remains is a story of life as it was lived in the eighteenth century, with America for a shadowy background, and with a far-off echo of Braddock's campaign. The best scene is the first of all, in which is described Harry Warrington's visit to the home of his ancestors. Seldom has the sentiment of the returned traveller been better rendered, and this traveller returns to a home which he knew only by tradition and report. Yet, though he looked upon the scene for the first time, it was perfectly familiar to his eye. He easily pictured the knights and huntsmen of a bygone age crossing the ford, to draw the sword perchance in the service of their king, or to hunt their quarry with hawk and hound. Meantime "the clinking of the blacksmith's forge, the noises of the evening, the talk of the rooks, and the calling of the birds," stirred in his mind the recollection of a past he had never seen, and yet knew more intimately than that which happened a year ago in Virginia. If only Thackeray had kept the whole book in this same key he would have written a masterpiece fit to rank with *Esmond*, but unhappily he soon let the necessity of writing so much a-month conquer him, and the book made itself the vehicle of the social prejudices and historical sympathies of its author. Even though the scene be laid at the Wells or the playhouse, the reader cannot but think of Pendennis or Clive Newcome. Harry Warrington is but these blameless youths in another dress. Though he gambles with a braver recklessness than the young Pendennis, he is, like that hero, merely "wild," not "wicked"; and yet,

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despite the author's protestations, despite Harry's virtuous attachment to the aged Maria, despite even the priggish reprimands of James Wolfe, and the sound advice of the amiable Lambert, the friend of March and Selwyn must, one is sure, have been wicked as well as wild. The Fortunate Youth, indeed, is not more easily convincing than Thackeray's other heroes; and while we are content to trace in the features of General Lambert, the kind, scholarly old soldier, who loved Rabelais, and sought his classical quotations in Burton's *Anatomy*, a resemblance to the author of his being, it is, as usual, in the rogues, not in the virtuous citizens, that Thackeray is at his best.

If Will Castlewood be exaggerated, Sampson, the roystering parson, who loves wine better than his prayers, and gambling better than either, is by no means ill-drawn. Still better is my Lord of Castlewood, who, though he is a sharper and a coward, preserves the outward seeming of a gentleman. He is a fine specimen of the correct rogue: he is the Barnes Newcome of his century, but better bred and better mannered. The young Virginians are rightly pleased to be in his company. Nothing can disturb his invariable attitude of politeness, and his dissipated pomposity is only skin-deep. He deplores to Harry Warrington the love of play which has made him the poorest peer in England; and though his reputation is so bad that few care to play with him, he regretfully spares the Mohock, as he called Harry, so long as he is under his roof. At the same time, he frankly recognised that he was a fool "to fatten

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a goose for other people to feed off." In brief, "he was a far abler man than many who succeeded in life. He had a good name, and somehow only stained it; a considerable wit, and nobody trusted it; and a very shrewd experience and knowledge of mankind, which made him distrust them, and himself most of all, and which was perhaps the bar to his own advancement." But such as he was, Thackeray drew him with evident understanding; and the best of him is that, though he shows the white feather, and cheats at the cards, he never loses the outward restraint and decorum of a gentleman.

A far greater figure is the Baroness de Bernstein, who not only confers distinction upon *The Virginians*, but is one of the very best portraits in Thackeray's gallery. Now Thackeray had a very keen eye for a worldly old woman; he understood, as few have understood, both the comedy and the bitterness of her existence. But never did he surpass the Baroness de Bernstein, who is superior to Miss Crawley in force, to Lady Kew in geniality, to both in humour. Though she is but Beatrix Esmond grown up, she is as far beyond that dashing young lady in temperament as in years; though she be harsh and imperious if she be not obeyed, she cherishes a warm affection for those who bow the knee and live up to her standard of conduct. But the shallow artifices which the Castlewood family adopted to gain her favour did not deceive her for a moment, and, "being a woman of great humour, she played upon the dispositions of the various members of this family, amused herself with

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their greedinesses, their humiliations, their artless respect for her money-box, and clinging attachment to her purse." But it was with a very different eye that she looked upon the strayling from Virginia, whose exclusion from Castlewood aroused her fury. An incivility put upon him excited her ire at the very outset. Perhaps it was the memory of the boy's grandfather that angered her against the meanness of the Castlewoods; but this restless and resolute woman instantly took Harry Warrington under her charge, and, callous-hearted though she were, she stoutly protected him against his cousins. The first meeting between the old lady and the Virginian is in Thackeray's best manner. When Harry first entered the garden of Castlewood, the baroness was "already pacing the green terraces which sparkled with the sweet morning dew, which lay twinkling, also, on a flowery wilderness of trim parterres, and on the crisp walls of the dark box hedges, under which marble fauns and dryads were cooling themselves, whilst a thousand birds sang, the fountains plashed and glittered in the rosy morning sunshine, and the rooks cawed from the great wood."

Admirable as is the setting, the dialogue is worthy of it. Nor was the baroness disappointed in the young Mohock: she talked of none but him, she praised his courage and address, until his cousins were weary of his name; and, with a rare confidence, she told him the story of the house, and showed him the room where his grandfather used to sleep, and the secret cupboard where Mr. Holt, the Jesuit, con-

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cealed his papers. But sentiment was not natural to her, and she very soon put it aside. With the greatest cunning she held up the absurd Maria to ridicule before the enamoured Virginian. "She takes liberties with herself," said the old lady, drinking from a great glass of negus. "She never had a good constitution. She is forty-one years old. All her upper teeth are false, and she can't eat with them." What words could have been more cleverly devised than these to kill the passion of love in a boy's heart? But the baroness did more; she did not scruple to steal the compromising letter which bound Harry to his Maria, and she only failed to separate the two because she did not rightly measure the depth of the boy's loyalty.

Above all, she wished that Harry should not grow up a milksop. She fondly believed that her nephew was leading not merely a merry life, but a wicked one, and had she known the truth she would have been bitterly disappointed. Even when the scapegrace was arrested she was still disposed to help him, provided he was not too deeply committed, for avarice quarrelled in her heart with affection, and in the old lady's eyes her own advantage still came first. Yet when Harry rejected her terms she was sincerely proud of him; she was delighted at the contempt with which he treated her lawyer; indeed she liked nothing better than to see a man insolent in adversity. And when her nephew was overwhelmed with ruin she gave him the soundest advice. "'Fiddle-de-dee, sir!' said she. 'Everybody has to put up with imper-

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tinences; and if you get a box on the ear, now you are poor and cast down, you must say nothing about it; bear it with a smile, and, if you can, revenge it ten years later. *Moi qui vous parle*, sir!—do you suppose I have had no humble-pie to eat? All of us in our turn are called upon to swallow it; and now you are no longer the Fortunate Youth, be the Clever Youth, and win back the place you have lost by ill-luck.'"

Dr. Tusher's widow no doubt had been given plenty of humble-pie, but she was endowed with a temperament which nothing could dismay, and at every point she was her nephew's superior. Yet keenly as she was interested in men and women, she found a still keener enjoyment in gambling, and she was never so happy as at the green table. "The cards," said she, in a passage of admirable philosophy, "don't cheat. A bad hand tells you the truth to your face; and there is nothing so flattering in the world as a good suite of trumps." So the baroness is drawn cynical and imperious, and from beginning to end she is consistent and alive. For once Thackeray was determined to depict a character without pointing a moral or embellishing a sentiment, and though we may regret the somewhat tedious surroundings in which Madame de Bernstein finds herself, we would not change a single touch in her admirable portrait.

Before the last number of *The Virginians* was published, Thackeray had undertaken the editorship of *The Cornhill*, an enterprise which brought wealth and fame to all concerned with it. The hour was pro-

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pitious, and the man was found. The magazines of 1859 were, with few exceptions, of a grave and sober suit. *The Quarterly* and *The Edinburgh* had not yet lost their autocracy; they still dictated what the world should think upon all matters of politics and literature. *Blackwood's* alone succeeded in combining instruction with amusement, and its example was clearly worth following. Nor could a better figurehead be found for the ship which George Smith was about to launch than the author of *The Virginians*. Thackeray's name was familiar to the whole English-speaking world, and while the slightest essay which he wrote himself was sure of attention, he was distinguished enough to enrol under his banner the greatest of the land. Moreover, the public taste was not yet debauched by "popular" literature, and it is not wonderful that the liberal energy of George Smith was instantly rewarded.

But the founder of *The Cornhill* did not make his happy choice without hesitation. His first intention was to rely upon Thackeray for a long story, and to intrust the editorship to another hand. But when Tom Hughes declined his aid, on the ground that he was pledged to another house, the publisher invited Thackeray to take the editor's chair, and it was under Thackeray's auspices that the first number of *The Cornhill* appeared. First of all a title was necessary, and it was Thackeray who hit upon the obvious yet distinguished name by which the magazine has been known for nearly half a century. In September, 1859, he wrote to George Smith from Coire, in Switzerland,

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telling him that St. Lucius, the founder of St. Peter's Church, Cornhill, was buried there. "Help us, good St. Lucius!" he exclaimed, and St. Lucius in return gave him the happy inspiration. Six days later the title was found: "The only name I can think of as yet is 'The Cornhill Magazine.' It has a sound of jollity and abundance about it." The proprietor welcomed the suggestion, and on January 1, 1860, the first number appeared. Its success was instant and overwhelming.[1] "It was the literary event of the year," said its proud founder; "along Cornhill nothing was to be seen but people carrying bundles of the orange-coloured magazine." Of the first number 120,000 copies were sold, and while the commercial triumph was never doubtful, the magazine won the esteem of all the best judges. Monckton Milnes thought it "almost too good both for the public it was written for and for the money it had to earn." Even FitzGerald, rarely roused to enthusiasm, pronounced the first number "famous," though his eagle-eye saw "the cockney let in" at the second number.

The success was well deserved and not surprising. Not only did Thackeray attract the wisest contributors, but George Smith was "lavish to recklessness,"[2]

[1] See Mrs. Richmond Ritchie's "First Number of *The Cornhill*" in *The Cornhill* of July, 1896, and Mr. G. M. Smith's "Our Birth and Parentage" in *The Cornhill* of January, 1901.

[2] Mr. Smith's figures are more eloquent than pages of comment. The largest sum he paid for a novel was £7,000, which was exchanged for *Romola*. The highest rate at which short articles were rewarded was £12, 12s. a page, which Thackeray received for *The Roundabout Papers*, and the most ever spent upon a single

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and the first number could hardly be surpassed in interest and variety. Mr. Anthony Trollope opened with the first chapters of *Framley Parsonage*, Thackeray himself began *Lovel the Widower*, and men so distinguished as Sir John Bowring and Sir John Burgoyne were content to suppress their names and give their knowledge. In brief, there was enough in the new magazine to attract all readers; the generous founder was justified of his liberality; and Thackeray took a frank delight in his victory. No sooner was the first number published than with a boyish enthusiasm, characteristic of him, he went off to Paris for a holiday. During these happy days he could not sleep, so he said, "for counting up his subscribers." He told Mr. James T. Fields, who found him in the Rue de la Paix half delirious with joy, that "London was not big enough to contain him, and he was obliged to add Paris to his residence." He was eager to buy pocketfuls of diamonds, that he might spend something at least of his princely income; and if he saw half-a-dozen Parisians chatting together, he was sure that news of *The Cornhill* had reached France, and that the circulation was still going up. But not only did he feel a private joy in his success; he blew the trumpet of *The Cornhill* with a public and a signal flourish. In a paper, entitled *On some Late Great Victories*, he celebrates his own and his proprietor's triumph. He fancies the Imperator standing on the steps of the temple on the Mons Frumentarius, and

number was £1,183, 3s. 8d. These figures might well turn the magazine-writer of to-day green with envy.

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addressing the citizens. "Quirites," says he, "in our campaign of six months we have been engaged six times, and in each action have taken near upon a *hundred thousand prisoners*. Go to! What are other magazines compared to our magazine?"

But in the cup of victory there was already a bitter drop; there were already thorns in the cushion which covered the throne of editorial state. Thackeray, in fact, soon found the chair, in which at the outset he took so just a pride, anything but comfortable. He had neither the sense of business which distinguishes the perfect editor, nor the hard heart which makes it easy to reject a proffered contribution. He was indifferent to the stings of adverse criticism. The shillelahs of all Donnybrook hurtled round his impavid head. But he could not bear to refuse the idle poetry or the foolish prose of those who thought their happiness depended upon his acceptance of their wares. "Before I was an editor," he wrote, "I did not like the postman much; but now!" It was in vain that he urged his correspondents to address their letters to the office of the magazine. He was pursued by complaints and entreaties even to his own door. Wherever he sat down, there was the thorn awaiting him, and he knew no remedy but to get rid of the editorial cushion forever. In May, 1862, then, he resigned. "I had rather have a quiet life than gold-lace and epaulettes," he said, in a characteristic letter of farewell, "and deeper than ever did plummet sound, I fling my speaking-trumpet." But though he resigned his editorship, he did not cease to

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contribute. "Let my successor command *The Cornhill*," wrote he, "giving me always a passage on board; and if the printer's boy rings at my door of an early morning, with a message that there are three pages wanting or four too much, I will send out my benediction to that printer's boy, and take t'other half-hour's doze."

However, Thackeray's success is indisputable. *The Cornhill* in his hands was not a mere rag-bag of odds and ends; it was a genuine magazine of literature, and the readers and writers of this age may look upon it with an envious regret. The vast interest which it excited, the vast circulation which it achieved, would be impossible to-day; nor can we contemplate the change which has come over the public taste with equanimity. The best books are for the few now, as always; but magazines make a direct appeal to the people, and survive only by the people's favour. Forty years ago Tennyson and Swinburne, Locker and Matthew Arnold, Lytton and Sir John Herschel, Sir James Stephen and Washington Irving, could ensure a generous publisher a hundred thousand subscribers. To-day they would be powerless to attract. They were not "bright"; they were not "chatty"; they were poets and men of letters giving their best and winning their proper reward. Contrast Thackeray's *Cornhill* with the printed stuff that is read to shreds in every 'bus and railroad of the kingdom, and you may measure the disastrous change which has come over the public taste. Can anything be more ignoble than the incoherent, useless information, the

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ruthless uncovering of privacy, which are the distinguishing marks of our popular magazines? And against this irrelevant gossip the best wits of the age would fight in vain; yet pestered though Thackeray was by thorns in his cushion, he was still an editor who might treat his contributors with generosity and his subscribers with respect.

Of Thackeray's own contributions to *The Cornhill* there is little to say. *Lovel the Widower* is the translation into another medium of a little play—*A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing*—which Thackeray composed for his friends. It contains the same reminiscences, the same reflections, which illumine Thackeray's larger works. Mr. Batchelor, like the author of his being, purchases a paper which brings him more experience than profit, and assumes the *rôle*, generally enacted by Pendennis, of special providence to all the characters of the story. But it is neither fresh nor sparkling, and little else need be said of it than that it made its first appearance in the first number of *The Cornhill* side by side with *Framley Parsonage*, and that doubtless it satisfied a public loyally determined to admire all that came from Thackeray's pen. Nor was *Philip* a more genuine success. Though it was built upon an ampler scale, and expressed a higher ambition, it is formless and void. It bears upon its pages all the signs of fatigue. Neither the action nor the characters progress at more than a foot's pace; the same situation recurs with a wearisome iteration; the hero is always poor and always quarrelling with his bread and butter; and when the split panel of a car-

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riage—surely a clumsy artifice—reveals old Ringwood's will, the reader can but be delighted that never again will Philip take counsel with Pendennis, the Cynic, and his too amiable Laura.

At the same time, *Philip* disarms criticism. No one was more honestly conscious of its defects than Thackeray himself. He knew that it was a mere echo from the past, and he spoke of it in the tone of tired depreciation. "Oh, it's weary work," he wrote to Mr. George Smith. "I don't know whether you or I should be most pitied." When Elwin, the truest of his friends, praised it, Thackeray did not hesitate to expose its weakness. "I have told my tale in the novel department," said he. "I can repeat old things in a pleasant way, but I have nothing fresh to say. I get sick of my task when I am ill, and think, Good heavens! what is all this stuff about?" There is a deep pathos in Thackeray's disgust at his own work. Yet the disgust and the pathos were perfectly sincere. To rewrite the early chapters of his autobiography, to tell the thrice-told tale of a young journalist's fight with poverty, was a hopeless task, and one which he probably would not have undertaken, had not ill-health hampered his imagination.

But when he said that he had "told his tale in the novel department," he was unduly depreciative. In *Denis Duval*, unhappily left a fragment at his death, he recovered his old mastery, he displayed his old style. Better than this, he suppressed himself more rigidly than he had ever done, save in *Barry Lyndon* and *Esmond*. He aimed with perfect deliberation at

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the reproduction of a certain period in which there was no scope for "snarling cynical remarks" nor trite moralities. In other words, he made a return to history, always his favourite pursuit, and he studied his characters and their environment with a rare diligence. Moreover, as though to compensate for the broken narrative, Thackeray left behind a set of notes which reveal to us the birth and progress of the story. For once, at any rate, the novelist was master of his material; for once he refused to follow whither his puppets led him. The germ of his plot may be found in *The Annual Register* of 1782, where the true history is told of M. de la Motte and the traitor Lütterloh. But how liberally has the author's imagination translated fact into fiction! With how deft a hand has he dressed the dry bones of truth in the trappings of romance! And while the notes upon *Denis Duval*, afterwards published by Mr. Greenwood, are a lucid commentary upon so much of the story as we possess, they prove with how fine a spirit the unwritten chapters might have been informed. We should have had an account of Pearson's splendid battle with Paul Jones, the Pirate; we should have been told how Denis Duval, chained in the hold of a Dutch East Indiaman, was rescued by the captain of a *Kingston* privateer; nor would this have been the last of Denis's adventures, for he was destined to rise by hard work and hard service, to see fighting in France and Spain and America, to witness the execution of Major André, and to prove himself in all latitudes a proper hero of romance. Then he was to encounter

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horse-thieves and smugglers; he was to take part in the Deal riots, and to oppose the great Mackerel party, of which his grandfather, the old *perruquier*, was an eminent member.

Indeed, the unwritten chapters of the book would have been salt with the sea-spray and red with the blood of fighting men. Above all, as if to show up his own familiar practice, in *Denis Duval* Thackeray had left nothing to chance. He had studied the topography and government of Winchelsea, the scene of his story, with the utmost care. He had noted its three gates, its mayor and twelve jurats, its privilege of "sending canopy-bearers to a coronation"; he had made researches into the French Reformed Church, whose members had a settlement at Rye—in brief, he had overlooked nothing which might throw light upon his period and his personages. Yet he subordinated the truth to a romantic effect with so delicate a tact that there is never a suspicion of pedantry in the book. In other words, he is not the slave of facts, and to compare his note-book with the unfinished fragment is an excellent lesson in the art of fiction. Admirable as are the characters who play their parts in the drama, it is the harmoniously consistent atmosphere of the story which wins our highest respect, and intensifies the regret that so fine a work was cruelly interrupted. Nor did its quality lack appreciation. "In respect of earnest feeling," said Charles Dickens, "far-seeing purpose, character, incident, and a certain loving picturesqueness blending the whole, I believe *Denis Duval* to be much the best of his

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works"; to which high tribute, generously paid by a great craftsman to his colleague, there is no word to add.

But besides his novels, Thackeray contributed to *The Cornhill* a set of essays called *The Roundabout Papers*, which contain much of his best writing. Mellower in judgment, maturer in temper, than his earlier essays, they are enlivened by a serious gaiety, an amiable reflection which their author rarely equalled. Their excellence is not suprising, because to write essays was at once the talent and the bane of Thackeray. He held opinions upon all subjects, and he liked to express them—a liking which discursively interrupted the progress of his stories. But in *The Roundabout Papers* he was preaching about himself, and the world, not about the puppets of his own creation, and he could be as desultory as he chose, without defeating his own purpose. FitzGerald declared that as he read them, he heard Thackeray "talking to him," and though "conversation" is not in general the test of a good book, the essayist may easily be forgiven if he talks to his readers. Thackeray, moreover, was checked by the necessities of the magazine to a concision that you do not often find in his works, and this simple restraint gave a fine measure and rhythm to his prose. Egoism is, as it should be, the essence of the papers. Thackeray discourses of his youth, his travels, and his method of writing, with the regretful geniality of an oldster looking back upon the past. With an affectation of garrulity, he records his pleasant reminiscences. Now, he pictures

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himself as a "lazy, idle boy," living in fancy with Dumas' musketeers, or returning home from school hungry and with an empty pocket. Now, he recalls the golden days of youth, "when the stage was covered with angels, who sang, acted, and danced," when Duvernay and Sontag shone star-like in the theatre. "Ah, Ronzi de Begnis, thou lovely one!" he exclaims; "Ah, Caradori, thou smiling angel! Ah, Malibran!" Thus he praises the *tempus actum*, like the old fogey he liked to think himself; thus he deplores the deterioration of women, and the lamentable taste of the young fellows, who still found beauty in the actresses of a degenerate age.

Then he strikes a sterner note, and in a panegyric of Macaulay and Washington Irving, sings the praises of his own craft. "We may not win the bâton or the epaulettes," said he, "but God give us strength to guard the honour of the flag." Or he rises to a just indignation against the policy of America. Or he eloquently advocates, in an essay *On Ribbons*, "an order of Britannia" for the unnamed heroes of the merchant service. But throughout these last essays his sympathies are wider and deeper than you expect in this castigator of human folly. Tom Sayers' victory over Heenan awoke his enthusiasm. "If I were absolute king," says he, "I would send Tom Sayers to the mill for a month, and make him Sir Thomas on coming out of Clerkenwell." He is happy, as usual, in remembering France, and the thought of Desseins' hostelry evokes a sympathetic memory not only of his own youth, but of Sterne,

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Brummel, and other birds of passage, who in days of yore sojourned at Calais. *The Roundabout Papers*, in brief, show the best side of Thackeray, and suggest, that though Thackeray could not refrain from essay-writing even in his novels, how brilliant an essayist was lost in the author of *Vanity Fair*.

Edward FitzGerald noted as a characteristic of these last papers a quick sensitiveness to adverse criticism—a nervous resentment against the misunderstanding of foolish persons. It is not only that Thackeray administers—in an essay *On Screens in Dining-Rooms*—a well-deserved castigation to Edmund Yates, whom he invites to "put up your notebook; walk out of the hall; and leave gentlemen alone who would be private, and wish you no harm"; he displays an inclination to take offence, which was alien to his nature. This FitzGerald attributed to ill-health; and it is true that his friends had observed a recurring fatigue. Yet again and again he rallied, and for a while anxiety was dispelled. The respite was not for long; his work was done; towards the end of the year 1863 he was gravely ill; and on the morning of Christmas Eve he died without pain or warning. Of death he had no fear; in Mrs. Ritchie's words, "he was not sorry to go." He had faced the end before with an easy mind and a confident trust. "Those we love can but walk down to the pier with us"—he had written some years before to Mrs. Proctor—"the voyage we must make alone. Except for the young or very happy, I cannot say I'm sorry for any one who dies."

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Not only did he look upon death with composure; he could contemplate with satisfaction twenty years of unremitting toil, and reflect that he had built his own monument. Death, then, had less regret for its victim than for his friends. He was mourned by thousands, who knew him only by his works, as well as by those whom intimacy permitted to understand their loss. FitzGerald (the oldest, most faithful of his friends, yet one of how many!) sat moping about him in his "suburb grange," and reading his books, and thinking he would "hear his step up the stairs to this Lodging as in old Charlotte Street thirty years ago." And without doubt or question we may echo FitzGerald's informal epitaph: "a great Figure has sunk under Earth."

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CHAPTER IX

THE WRITER AND THE MAN[1]

THACKERAY possessed in a greater measure than any other English writer the *style coulant*, which Baudelaire ascribed in dispraise to George Sand. His words flow like snow-water upon the mountainside. He could no more restrain the current of his prose than a gentle slope could turn a rivulet back upon its course. His sentences dash one over the other in an often aimless succession, as though impelled by a force independent of their author. The style, as employed by Thackeray, has its obvious qualities and defects. It is so easy that it may be followed by the idlest reader, who willingly applies to literature the test of conversation. The thread of argument or of character is so loosely held that it need not elude a half-awakened attention. On the other hand, the style must needs be at times inaccurate and undistinguished. The solecisms of which he is guilty, and they are not few, may readily be forgiven. It is more difficult to pardon the frequent lack of distinction, especially as in *Esmond*

[1] In this last chapter I propose to regather the threads, to resume as briefly as may be the traits, which mark Thackeray off from his fellows both as a writer and as a man. Much has been said in the preceding chapters on those subjects, and I may perhaps be forgiven if, for the sake of completeness, I am now and again guilty of repetition.

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Thackeray proved that he could write, if he would, with perfect artistry. But the method of his more familiar books seems the result less of artifice than of temperament. He seldom gives you the impression that he has studied to produce a certain effect. An effect is there, of course, facile and various, but beyond his management. He is so little conscious of his craft, that he rarely arrives at the right phrase, thus presenting an obvious contrast to Disraeli, who, often careless in composition, yet sowed his pages with pearls of speech which time cannot dim. But how little do we take away from the most of Thackeray beyond a general impression of gentlemanly ease!

From this it follows that he possessed no economy of speech. He never used one word, if a page and a half could adequately express the meaning, and at all save his high moments you miss a controlling hand, a settled purpose. Nor is this remarkable, when you recall the shifts and starts in which he did his work. He was of those who write better anywhere than in their own house. He would carry his unfinished manuscript to Greenwich with him, and write a chapter after dinner, or he would go off to Paris, and compose as he went. "I should never be at home," he told Elwin, "if I could help it. . . . I write less at home than anywhere. I did not write ten pages of *The Newcomes* in that house at Brompton. . . . This"—meaning a hotel—"is the best place to work in."

While Thackeray left the words to look after themselves, he confesses himself the humble slave of his

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own characters. "Once created," said he, "they lead me, and I follow where they direct." He devised his actors as by instinct, and without realising the full meaning of the drama in which they played their part. "I have no idea where it all comes from," he told Elwin. "I have never seen the people I describe, nor heard the conversations I put down. I am often astonished myself to read it when I have got it on paper." It is not strange, therefore, that he regarded the personages in his own dramas as quite outside himself. "I have been surprised," says he, "at the observations made by some of my characters. It seems as if an occult power was moving the pen." And it was precisely this externality which linked Thackeray and his characters in the bonds of acquaintance. Had they been the deliberate and conscious creations of his brain, they would have been at once more and less familiar to him. He would have remembered precisely where the strings lay which pulled the figures; but he could not have said, "I know the people utterly—I know the sound of their voices." He would not have seen Philip Firmin in a chance visitor; he would not have recognised the drunken swagger of Captain Costigan, when he met him, years after his creation, in a tavern. We may be quite sure that he never encountered Sir Francis or Beatrix Esmond, for these he made himself; but the majority of his characters grew without his knowledge, and even against his will. "That turning back to the old pages," he murmurs in a passage of genuine lament, "produces anything but elation of mind. Would you

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not pay a pretty fine to be able to cancel some of them? Ah, the sad old pages, the dull old pages!"

It was this fatality, this frank obedience to his own puppets and his own pen, which explains the frequent formlessness of Thackeray's work. But though he permitted most of his books to write themselves, it must not be thought that his style was uniformly hazardous. Despite its occasional inaccuracy, despite its loose texture, it has many shining qualities. It is graphic, various, and at times eloquent. It is easy to recall a hundred passages which would entitle Thackeray to a high place among the writers of English. The Waterloo chapters of *Vanity Fair*, much of *Esmond*, Harry Warrington's first visit to England, Denis Duval's journey to London,—these, to name but a few, are touched by the hand of a master, who need fear comparison with none. Even where Thackeray's prose is least under control, it inspires no more than his own regret that he did not write "a completely good book." For it is always the prose of a man of letters.

Now, in Thackeray's time scholarship was not fashionable. Neither Dickens nor Bulwer (save in his last novels) give you a sense of literary allusion. But Thackeray, in his most careless mood, suggests the classics or hints at the eighteenth century. As he wrote rather as an essayist than as a novelist, as his style was a sincere, untrammelled expression of his mind, he reveals his literary preferences by a thousand light touches. His reading, if not wide, was deep. He was perfectly familiar with both the Augustan

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ages. Horace he knew best of all, and quoted most constantly. Nothing pleases him better than to allude in a phrase to his favourite poet. "Nuper—in former days—I too have militated," thus he writes in *The Roundabout Papers*, "the years slip away fugacius;" and again, "to-morrow the diffugient snows will give place to Spring." Above all, he loved the Augustan doctrine of an easy life. The contemner of Swift naturally found Juvenal a "truculent brute," but he felt a natural sympathy for the satirist of Venusia, who timidly avoided unpleasant themes, and who, had he lived in the nineteenth century, would have been a man about town, and have haunted the very clubs to which Thackeray himself belonged. And when he chose to express himself in verse, he echoed with skill and fidelity both the manner and the philosophy of Horace.

To our own Augustan age his *Lectures on the Humourists* are an eloquent, if misleading, tribute. He was, after them, the eloquent champion of simplicity. That which he prized most highly in his own work was the rigid exclusion of barbarous or fantastic words, the stern avoidance of involved sentences. And what he avoided himself, he sternly reprobated in others. See how wittily, in his *Essay on Thunder and Small Beer*, he exposes the turgid sentences of *The Times*, with how hot an iron he brands the pompous Latin of the critic. "That is proper economy," says he of the Thunderer's finest sentence, "as you see a buck from Holywell Street put every pinchbeck pin, ring, and chain which he possesses about his

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shirt, hands, and waistcoat, and then go out and cut a dash in the park, or swagger with his order to the theatre." But Thackeray would have his ornaments few and appropriate. Maybe the Augustan ideal, *simplex munditiis*, impoverished his style; maybe he would have been the greater for a deeper consciousness of himself and his appearance. And though he loyally followed the simplifiers of our English tongue, he knew and admired the better models. If we assume, as we may, that General Lambert, of *The Virginians*, was his mouthpiece, he loved Rabelais and Burton with a constant heart, though he did not admit their influence. Lamb he canonised, and he could quote to excellent purpose Richard Graves' *Spiritual Quixote*, a piece of satire ill deserving the oblivion into which it has fallen. Again, he tells us that Montaigne and Howell's *Letters* were his "bedside books." "If I wake at night," said he, "I have one or other of them to prattle me to sleep again." But it was not until he attained the serene egoism of *The Roundabout Papers* that either of these writers directed his footsteps, and though they solaced his sleepless nights, by temper and sympathy he remained a true Augustan.

In nothing did he show himself a man of letters more clearly than in his versatility. He could bend his mind to more than one kind of literature. For him the English language was an instrument upon which he could play many measures. In his hands it was apt for satire or reflection, for fiction or criticism. Though he was often careless of his own style, he had a quick perception of style in others, as is proved by

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his imitations of the novelists, the very perfection of criticism. It is doubtful whether Disraeli took much pleasure in *Codlingsby*, which, nevertheless, touches off the extravagances of his style with a wit which is still modest, with a humour which will never lose its sparkle. Then, again, he was a great hand at a controversy, as many a mangled opponent found to his cost. And he could turn easily from a full-length novel to the exquisite fooling of a tale written for children. His *Christmas Books*, though written in conformity with a prevailing custom, are by no means the worst of his works, and he seldom surpassed the amiable drollery and good humour which keep *The Rose and the Ring* ever fresh.

Once upon a time he aspired to be a painter; he had worked in a Parisian studio; and it is therefore the more remarkable that he is seldom deliberately "picturesque." He does not, like the novelists of our own day, ladle his local colour out from a full bucket. He may weary the reader with tedious sermons; he never tries his patience with purple passages of irrelevant description. Indeed, he so sternly suppresses the external world that when you recall his novels, you have but a faint impression of the scene on which the drama is played. The few landscapes which he sketches produce, from their very rarity, an astonishing effect. There is, for instance, a picture of Baden by night in *The Newcomes*, which presents the whole scene without the waste of a word: "The lights twinkle in the booths under the pretty lime avenues," thus the passage runs. "The hum of distant voices

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is heard; the gambling palace is all in a blaze; it is an assembly night; and from the doors of the Conversation Rooms, as they open and close, escape gusts of harmony. Behind on the little hill the darkling woods lie calm, the edges of the fir-trees cut sharp against the sky, which is clear with a crescent moon." Again there is a keen sense of the open air in the passage which describes Esmond's departure from Newgate, and Temple Garden looking "like the garden of Eden," and "the busy shining scene of the Thames swarming with boats and barges"; and best of all there is the picture of Clavering, drawn with careful discrimination, and the artist's eye on the object. For the rest, Thackeray is more deeply interested in his characters than in their environment; and though his reticence is vastly preferable to the ill-considered picturesqueness, nowadays so popular, we would gladly have exchanged a hundred of his sermons for one deft sketch of an English countryside or foreign watering-place.

It has been said more than once that Thackeray was impervious to the influences of his time. He never had the literary measles; he never submitted to the dictation of coteries. He did not find himself by the sedulous imitation of others. What he was at the beginning he was at the end,—a man of letters, to whom time and experience gave not a new style, but merely a better control of his material. He lived through the Romantic movement unscathed, and he borrowed not much else from Balzac than a trick of keeping the characters he had once created for an-

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other occasion. But he was more intent to preserve their names than their personalities, and got little else from the French literature, which he knew well, than a few superfluous Gallicisms. Of his own fancy he had not a high opinion. "One of Dickens' immense superiorities over me," said he, "is the great fecundity of his imagination. Perhaps Bulwer is better than both of us in this quality; his last book written at fifty is fresher than anything he has ever done." This statement hardly does justice to Thackeray's talent. It is true that in such works as *Philip* he merely repeated himself; but the repetition was the result of fatigue; and if imagination be anything better than the invention of odd types and strange embroilments, Thackeray had his share of it. To put a plain man upon his legs is (maybe) a more difficult feat of fancy than to depict a brigand, and Thackeray's triumph was won in the field of realism. Not that he practised the method as it has been understood since his day, or that he cared for the arid accumulation of superfluous facts. On the contrary, he could neither suppress himself nor forget the familiar tricks of the fairy story. But he aspired always to be a painter of manners, an historian of his own time, and this creditable aspiration gave an air of reality to his novels.

His contemporaries believed that he was something more than a novelist. In the simple, trusting view of Charlotte Brontë, for instance, he shone as a social regenerator, and he himself resolutely hoped to better mankind. He complained that Byron never

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wrote from his heart, and he forgot that the head, not the heart, is the safer place wherefrom to write. So he valued himself and was valued by others, not for his admirable gifts of humorous portraiture, for his careful dissection of human foibles, but for the idle work of "social regeneration," which cannot live out its own day, and for many tedious sermons. The truth is, there were always two men in Thackeray, the sentimental moralist, whose obvious "lessons" were long since forgotten, and the keen-eyed ironist, for whom life was an amusing game, whose rules were independent of virtue, and in which the scoundrel was most often victorious. It is this twofold character which explains why the most of Thackeray's work was marred by a kind of uncertainty, and justifies Carlyle's admirable comment: "a beautiful vein of genius lay struggling about in him." The genius never overcame the struggle. When the ironist was disposed to take a large view, the moralist interrupted his vision, and the moralist was so tight bound to the superstitions of his age, that he will probably never appear as great as he did to some of his contemporaries.

And as the writer was perplexed by a twofold character, so also was the man. It would be easily possible, without suppressing or twisting a single fact, to draw two distinct and opposing Thackerays. The blackest portrait we have of him is Disraeli's St. Barbe, which is painted in the darkest colours, and without relief. Now St. Barbe, in Endymion's phrase, is "the vainest, most envious, and the most

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amusing of men." He "snarls over the prosperity of every one in this world except the snarler." He is a misanthrope, "because he finds every one getting on in life except himself." When Seymour Hicks goes to a party, "that fellow gets about in a most extraordinary manner," complains St. Barbe. "Is it not disgusting? . . . No lord ever asked me to dinner. But the aristocracy of this country is doomed." When, however, he dines at the Neuchâtel's, he takes a frank delight in his host's magnificence, and only regrets that he did not know the great man a year ago, when he might have dedicated his novel to him. That is one portrait—of the malicious, satirical dog, and it is superfluous to say that it is overcharged. The other portrait, painted in lighter colours, represents a man of infinite sensibility, eager only to do good to his less fortunate neighbours,—a cynic, whose cynicism is but a cloak for kindliness, a modest gentleman, equally alive to his own defects and to the merits of others. Of course neither portrait is true, because both are inhuman, and the truth will be found, as always, between the two. But one thing is certain, if we may judge by the memoirs of the time: Thackeray was not popular. It was generally thought that this David, who had slain many a titled Goliath, took a frank pleasure in the society of the great. He was brusque in speech, and quick in anger. He gave wanton offence to strangers, who would not take the trouble to pierce beneath the surface. When Anthony Trollope was first presented to him, he murmured "How do?"

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and turned his back. Trollope, of course, effaced the first impression, but at the time he was justly angry, and declared to George Smith that had he not "been in his house for the first time, he would have walked out of it."

With Thackeray's dislike of his baser *confrères* it is possible to sympathise. He loved his craft, but not all his fellow-craftsmen. His vanity was too great to bear the life of Grub Street. From long commerce with those whom he properly deemed his inferiors he was sensitively alive to his own superiority. Though he loved equality as a doctrine, he would permit no equality between himself and his colleagues. "There is a *modus in rebus*," said he with perfect justice; "there are certain lines which must be drawn: and I am only half pleased, for my part, when Bob Bow-street, whose connection with letters is through Policeman X and Y, and Tom Garbage, who is an esteemed contributor to *The Kennel Miscellany*, propose to join fellowship as brother literary men, slap me on the back, and call me old boy, or by my Christian name." One can easily imagine how he winced under the infliction of Tom Garbage, but Tom Garbage and his kind are apt to take their revenge, and Thackeray never cared to conciliate them. He knew perfectly well that he was not a favourite. "All people do not like me as you do," he wrote to Elwin. "I sometimes think I am deservedly unpopular, and in some cases I rather like it. Why should I want to be liked by Jack and Tom? . . . I know the Thackeray that those fellows have im-

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agined to themselves—a very selfish, heartless, artful, morose, and designing man."[1]

Indeed, it was in these colours that Thackeray too often presented himself to the world. He appeared morose, and even insolent, to many who had but a superficial acquaintance with him. He was a big man—he stood six feet two—who sometimes behaved like a big boy. For him the world was still Grey Friars, with himself head of the sixth form, and he did not scruple to bully the youngsters. It is not strange, therefore, that he was disliked. Even Lord Houghton admits an "inequality and occasional perversity in his conduct," which, however, he attributes to illness. On the other hand, he was naturally a man of quick feeling and deep affection. But as irony and morals conflicted in his novels, so superiority and amiability fought in his character. He would, and he could, have been at peace with mankind. "Love," he said, "is a higher intellectual exercise than hatred." When, in 1849, Lady Blessington's treasures were sold by auction, the valet wrote to his mistress in these terms: "M. Thackeray est venu aussi, et avait les larmes aux yeux en partant.

[1] It is unnecessary to discuss the dispute between Thackeray and Edmund Yates further than to say that in this public encounter with Grub Street Thackeray seems to have been in the right. It is true that Thackeray himself had not scrupled to hold up certain of his contemporaries to ridicule. But fiction and the newspaper should be tried by different standards. Moreover, five-and-forty years ago personal journalism was not yet omnipotent, and Thackeray had no resource but to protest against what he believed a breach of private confidence.

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C'est, peut-être, la seule personne que j'ai vu réellement affectée à votre depart." There is an unsolicited testimonial, the significance of which cannot be overlooked. Moreover, Thackeray was often generous both in deed and thought. His many acts of charity he was stern to conceal, but he did not hide his appreciation of those whom the people called his rivals.

How, then, shall we harmonise the conflicting opinions? John Blackwood, who knew and loved him well, declared that he was a mixture of "bitterness and warm feeling," which seems no more than the truth. To this one he showed his bitterness, to that his warm feeling, and each went off with his own story. Nor is Mrs. Ritchie's explanation incompatible. "He was a diffident man," she says, "sensitive and easily wounded, especially by any one for whom he had a regard," and every one knows how easily diffidence may be mistaken for pride, sensitiveness for ill-temper. Thackeray, moreover, had fits of arrogance, which may well have astounded the Philistine, and nothing more clearly illustrates his twofold character than an episode to be found in Lord Tennyson's *Life*. Thackeray and Tennyson had dined together —it was in 1846—and Thackeray, full of confidence in his own powers, had said of Catullus: "I do not rate him highly. I could do better myself." The morrow brought a more modest reflection. "My dear Alfred," he wrote the next day, "I woke at two o'clock"—it was the other Thackeray who woke— "and in a sort of terror at a certain speech I had

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made about Catullus. When I have dined, sometimes I believe myself to be equal to the greatest painters and poets. That delusion goes off, and then I know what a small fiddle mine is, and what small tunes I play upon it. It was very generous of you to give me an opportunity of recalling a silly speech; but at the time I thought I was making a perfectly simple and satisfactory observation. Thus far I must unbosom myself: though why should I be uneasy at having made a conceited speech? It is conceited not to wish to seem conceited." It is a pleasant story, which illustrates both sides of Thackeray's temperament, and helps us to resolve the riddle of his character.

His contemporaries, then, were compelled to judge him with half the facts before them, and it is the greater pity because many admirable qualities mitigated the stern view taken by his enemies. He was liberally endowed with the rare and simple virtues. He did not always take himself and his art too seriously. "As for posterity," he once said, "be sure that it will have its own authors to read, and I know one who has very little anxiety about its verdict." And though a belief in immortality was no compensation to him, he faced the adversity of his early years with conspicuous courage, content to do his day's work, and win its reward, a reward which would seem paltry in these days of avarice. He never stooped to win an advantage by vain advertisement, nor to achieve success by any means derogatory to his high calling. But when prosperity came he delighted in it

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with the candour of a big boy who had won a prize; and nothing could exceed the pleasure which he showed in his house at Kensington, or in the immediate triumph of *The Cornhill*. Early and late he liked to pose as a man of the world, and that he was a haunter of clubs is essential both to his life and work. Indeed, it was this fact, coupled with an inverted snobbishness, that exposed him to the charge of cynicism. Yet of the two men, the cynic and the sentimentalist, who made up Thackeray, one would have thought that the sentimentalist most often predominated. And let it be remembered, that if he turned the cold shoulder to the passing stranger, the best of his contemporaries—Alfred Tennyson and Edward Fitzgerald—knew him and loved him well. "A big mass of a soul, but not strong in proportion" —such was Carlyle's verdict, which we may accept in sympathy and understanding.

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THE END

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Thackeray once said that [illegible] he only exact portrait in "Vanity Fair" [illegible] at of Sir Pitt Crawley—and this he said in [illegible] to a fair critic who thought all the characters of the book were natural except Sir Pitt. "Surely," she complained, "he is overdrawn; it is impossible to find such coarseness in his rank of life." Mr. Melville notes that the prototype's identity has recently been revealed in the person of a former Lord Rolle. "Sir Pitt's letters to Becky," the discoverer is quoted as saying, "were very badly spelt and written, and I may say that I have in my possession a letter written by Sir Robert Brownrigg to his royal highness the Duke of York, when commander in chief of the British army, complaining that a report received from Lord Rolle, as lord lieutenant of his county, was so badly written that he could not decipher it."

Into the character of Arthur Pendennis Thackeray put something of himself, and we know that there were glimpses of his friend Crauford in George Warrington. We are inclined to think that Mrs. Ritchie is right i[illegible] recognizing in Warrington something of h[illegible] father, too, and something of Edward Fitz Ge[illegible]ald. As for the women in "Pendennis," we [illegible] told that only one has been traced to [illegible] original:

Like Becky, Blanche Amory, if, strictly speaking she had not a prototype, at least was suggested by an acquaintance. "At the train, whom do you think I found? Miss G——, who says she is Blanch[illegible] Amory, and I think she is Blanche Amory; amiable at times, amusing, clever, and depraved Thackeray wrote to the Brookfields. "We talk[illegible] and persiflated all the way to London, and t[illegible] idea of her will help me to a good chapter, which I will make Pendennis and Blanche play being in love, such a wicked, false, humbuggi[illegible] London love as two blasé London people might [illegible] and half deceive themselves that they were in [illegible]nest. That will complete the cycle of Mr. P[illegible] worldly experiences, and then we will make, or to make, a good man of him." The resemblanc[illegible] Blanche Amory to Miss G—— was distinct enc[illegible] for Mrs. Carlyle to notice. "Not that poor [illegible] —— is quite such a little devil as Thackeray, has detested her from a child, has here repre[illegible]ed," she remarked. "But the looks, the mar[illegible] the wiles, the larmes, and all that sort of [illegible] are perfect." This was almost magnanimo[illegible] Mrs. Carlyle, for both she and her husban[illegible] liked the girl. "Oh, my dear!" Mr. Carly[illegible] claimed when she went away, "we cannot be[illegible]ciently thankful." Not that Carlyle's ob[illegible] counts for much, for he was a gey ill pe[illegible] get along with.

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